Pickwick's Cambridge Scrapboook 1838:
Life, Times and People in Dickensian Cambridgeshire.

Illustrated

By

Mike Petty

A Series of Articles Published in the Cambridge Weekly News
6th June 1996 to 19th November 2010
in which local historian
Mike Petty
explored the lost-lost diary of Samuel Pickwick's visit to Cambridge in 1838

Pickwick's Cambridge Scrapbook

Dusting off the pages in search of knowledge

Mike Petty, Principal Librarian of the Cambridgeshire Collection, discovers the 1838 diary of Samuel Pickwick's visit to Cambridge

THAT Samuel Pickwick visited Cambridge in September 1838 is not in doubt.

He was seen by some scores of people at the Theatre Royal in Barnwell promoting his recently published reminiscences, though the audience were distinctly unimpressed.

The editor of the Cambridge Chronicle could not fail to acknowledge the presence in their midst of one of the most famous personages of the day but commented "with Pickwick at the theatre we turned to other papers".

Yet if Pickwick's long forgotten presence is without dispute there is a lingering mystery.

For a man such as he arriving at a such a place as Cambridge in a such a year as 1838 could not have failed to observe the everyday life of the community, especially as that ordinary life was at the time most extraordinary.

Cambridge was in turmoil, the town council reeling from the impact of municipal reform, the mayor accused of profiteering from the new police force and the university of exceeding its powers over pubs.

Everywhere building was taking place from the grand developments of new Fitzwilliam Museum and University Library to the new workhouse on Mill Road and the small streets of New Town.

Inclosure Commissioners were at work in the open fields of Chesterton and speculators were discussing the new railway line which was even then pushing north from London.

All this Pickwick discovered, but there was more.

During his sojourn he met rogues and vagabonds, befriended prostitutes and professors, stagecoach drivers and tradesmen eking a living despite proctorial disapproval.

He saw at first hand the wealth of the colleges and the squalor of the Barnwell backstreets.

All of this he recorded intending to share it with the members of the Corresponding Society he had established to report journeys and adventures and observation of character and manners.

Yet that information was never imparted.

For some reason when Pickwick left Cambridge his notes did not.

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When opened it was found to contain a folder packed with cuttings, posters, handbills and prints together with a notebook in a small crabbed hand full of abbreviations and contractions, difficult in the extreme to decipher.

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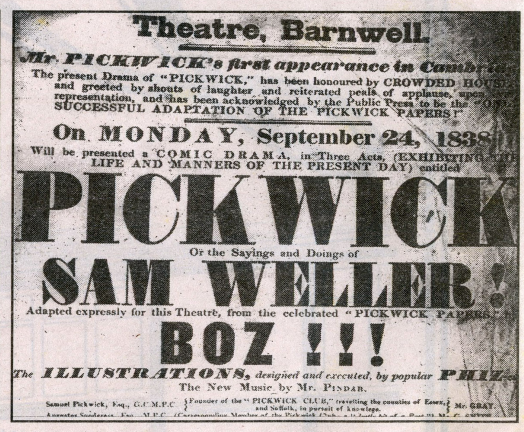
With the wealth of detail and observation never brought together before this can only be the lost Cambridge scrapbook of Samuel Pickwick

NEXT WEEK Mike Petty starts to explore the contents of the scrapbook of 1838

Trumpington street in Samuel Pickwick's time



Theatre, Barnwell.

Mr. PICKWICK's first appearance in Cambridge.

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On MONDAY, September 24, 1838

Will be presented a COMIC DRAMA, in Three Acts, (EXHIBITING THE LIFE AND MANNERS OF THE PRESENT DAY) entitled

PICKWICK

Or the Sayings and Doings of

SAM WELLER!

Adapted expressly for this Theatre, from the celebrated "PICKWICK PAPERS."

BOZ !!!

The ILLUSTRATIONS, designed and executed, by popular PHIZ.

The New Music by Mr. PINDAR.

Samuel Pickwick, Esq., G.C.M.P.C. } Founder of the "PICKWICK CLUB," travelling the counties of Essex, and Norfolk, in pursuit of knowledge. } Mr. GRAY.

Poster proof of Mr Pickwick's visit to Cambridge, 1838

Pickwick's Cambridge Scrapbook 1838.
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1

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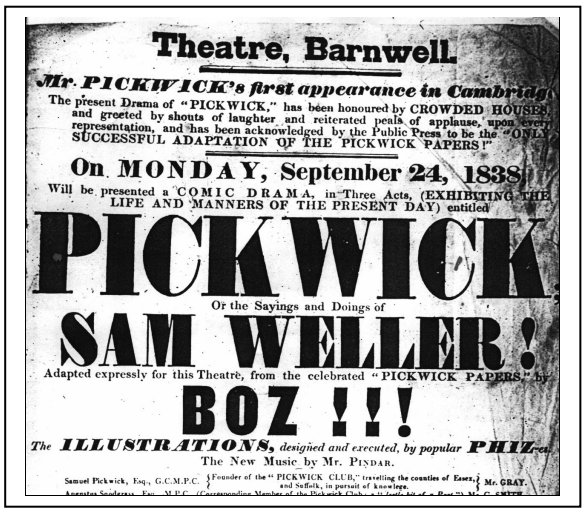
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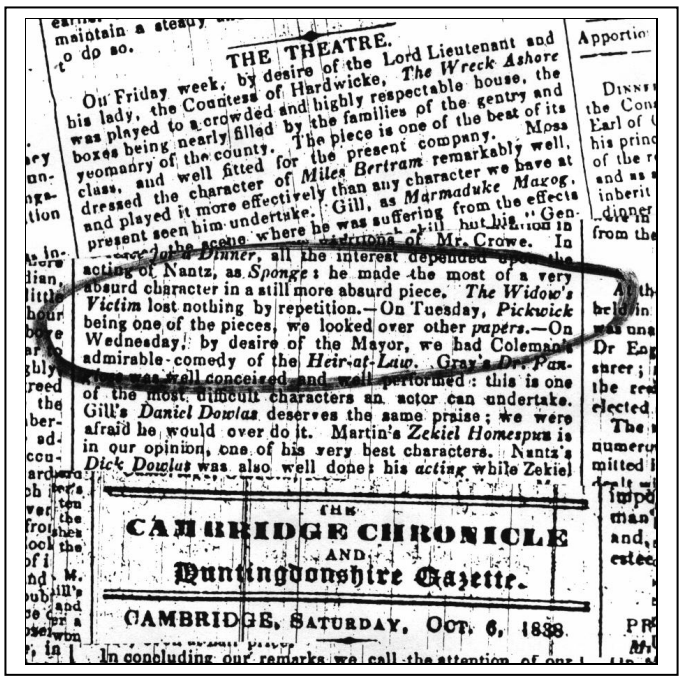
THE THEATRE.

On Friday week, by desire of the Lord Lieutenant and his lady, the Countess of Hardwicke, *The Wreck Ashore* was played to a crowded and highly respectable house, the boxes being nearly filled by the families of the gentry and yeomanry of the county. The piece is one of the best of its class, and well fitted for the present company. Moss dressed the character of *Miles Bertram* remarkably well, and played it more effectively than any character we have at present seen him undertake. Gill, as *Marmaduke Magog*, [illegible] the scene where he was suffering from the effects [illegible] of Mr. Crowe. In [illegible] *Dinner*, all the interest depended upon the acting of Nantz, as *Sponge*: he made the most of a very absurd character in a still more absurd piece. *The Widow's Victim* lost nothing by repetition.—On Tuesday, *Pickwick* being one of the pieces, we looked over other *papers*.—On Wednesday, by desire of the Mayor, we had Coleman's admirable comedy of the *Heir-at-Law*. Gray's *Dr. Pax* [illegible] was well conceived and well performed: this is one of the most difficult characters an actor can undertake. Gill's *Daniel Dowlas* deserves the same praise; we were afraid he would over do it. Martin's *Zekiel Homespun* is in our opinion, one of his very best characters. Nantz's *Dick Dowlas* was also well done: his *acting* while Zekiel

THE CAMBRIDGE CHRONICLE AND Huntingdonshire Gazette.

CAMBRIDGE, SATURDAY, OCT. 6, 1838.

In concluding our remarks we call the attention of our

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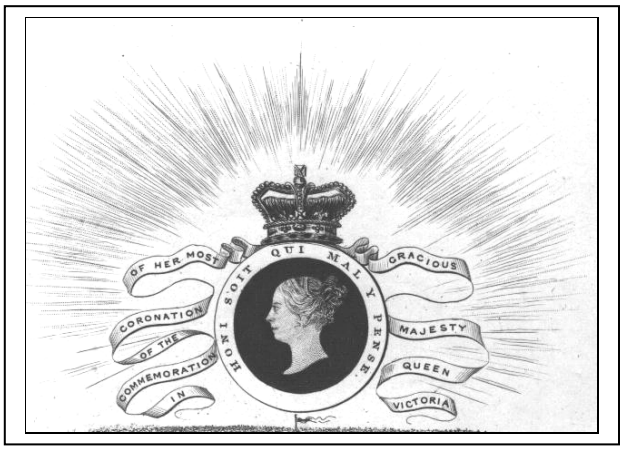
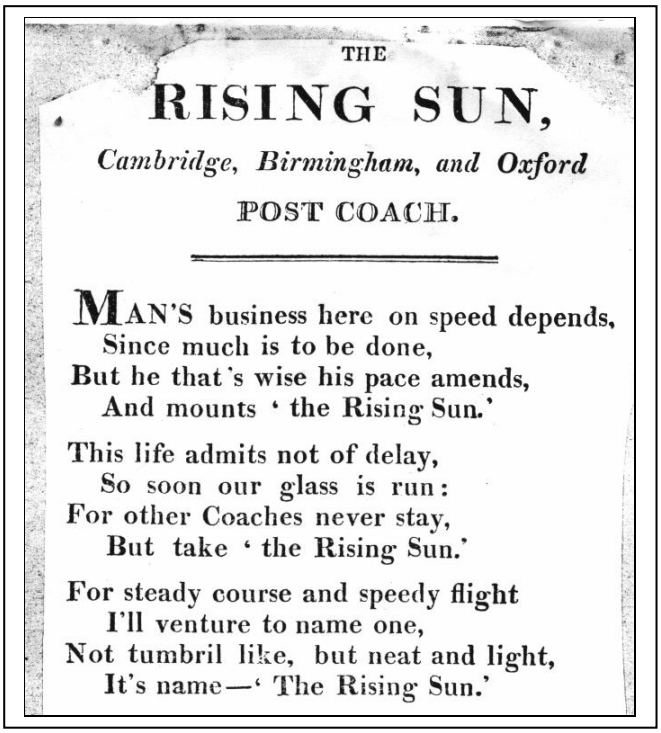


London in the Summer of 1838 was the place to be - and the place to escape from. Virtually the sole topic of conversation - when not bemoaning the lack of progress on the Thames Tunnel, the rebuilding of the Houses of Parliament following the fire four years earlier, the proposed memorial to Nelson or the ghost which was attacking women - was Royalty. Not so much the scandel at Buckingham Palace (but was it not intolerable that a lunatic silversmith should get in so easily) but the Coronation of Princess Alexandrina - persuaded by her Ministers to adopt the title of Queen Victoria.

As a consequence the Capital was full to bursting with crowned heads and hangers on from throughout Europe as well as the general populace who flocked in to witness the spectacle and the jollifications which accompanied it.



THE

RISING SUN,

Cambridge, Birmingham, and Oxford

POST COACH.

MAN'S business here on speed depends,
Since much is to be done,
But he that's wise his pace amends,
And mounts 'the Rising Sun.'

This life admits not of delay,
So soon our glass is run:
For other Coaches never stay,
But take 'the Rising Sun.'

For steady course and speedy flight
I'll venture to name one,
Not tumbril like, but neat and light,
It's name—'The Rising Sun.'

This seemed the perfect opportunity to undertake a journey which had been often contemplated, though never before attempted. Bury St Edmunds had been close but this time it had to be Cambridge itself

It was moreover a good time to travel. The Cambridge road had of late been much improved - with many thanks to Mr McAdam - and travelling times had plummeted - indeed it was well established that one could leave Cambridge at six in the morning, get a good breakfast on the road, and be in London by noon. There one could transact business, get a comfortable bit of grub before boarding the coach at 3pm and be back in Cambridge by 8.30.

It all of course depended on the choice of stagecoach and the quality of the driver. The "Star" with Joe Walton up had good teams of horses the whole way, not just on the first and final changes, and could go at a tremendous pace if necessary. He had a good nerve and a perfect command of his horses whether combatting the traffic of the city on a crowded day or urging the team along the open road.

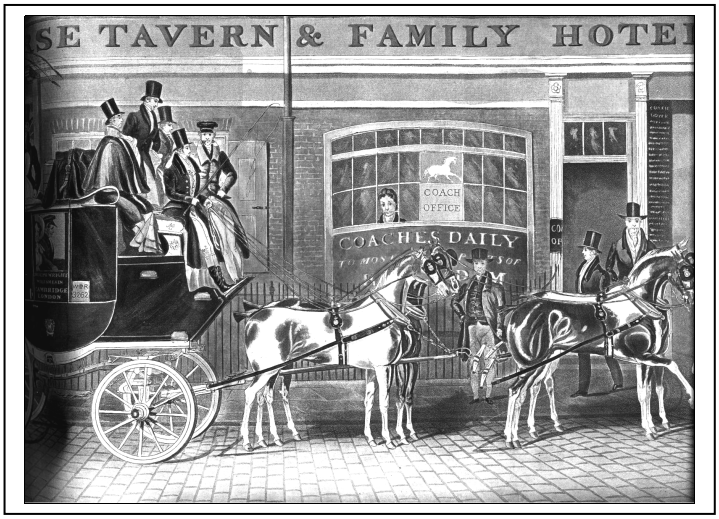
Others such as the "Defiance" were known to be on their last legs and gave a most unsettling ride - galloping past the "Star" at one minute then creeping along the next, not allowing anybody to overtake. What was more the coachman often stopped overnight at Buntingford where he was courting a widow woman and the devil to his passengers welfare.

Most ran through Royston where there had been recent work in cutting through the steep chalk hills but one of Swann's waggons loaded with flour and poultry for the London markets and passengers seeking a cheap conveyance had of late overturned at Wades Mill and another had nearly caught fire when the brakes overheated on the steep descent.

But there was one coach which avoided the Royston hills. The King's Lynn Union departed daily from Charing-Cross at 8 in the morning. A booking was duly made, the adventure could begin.

3

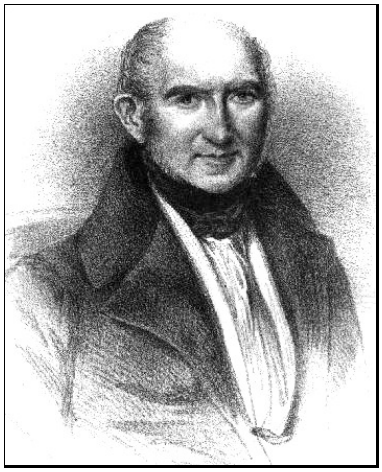
The notebook reveals that it was a disgruntled traveller who arrived at half past seven on an 1838 August morning at the Golden Cross, Charing Cross, London. It was a cross stagecoachman, Thomas Cross who greeted him. For although there was still a good thirty minutes before the advertised time of departure of the Kings Lynn Union coach it was apparent that something was amiss.



It soon transpired that the Company's earlier coach had been damaged due to its driver being distracted at the sight of a steam cab driving through Hyde Park at 12 mile an hour ... as if the new railways were not challenge enough to their livelihood! As a result the passengers had been offered accommodation on the later journey and were already assembled, waiting with impatience for the final addition to their overcrowded conveyance

"The rest of the company being most of them pretty burly had made a shift to leave me a nook in the back part of the coach not much wider than a chair for a jointed baby; I nestled, and I squeezed and drew in my sides till with much ado I had wedg'd in my buttocks between the side of the coach and the hip of rotund gentleman who sat next to me. When I had thus by storm and a great deal of fatigue taken my place I sat with patience upon force, crowded up like a great plumb in the corner of a minc'd pie"

But before many minutes were passed Cross cracked his whip and the horses started into life "whilst we at every swog neaded our elbows in one another's sides till I had the ill-fortune to raise an old gentleman's spleen, having given his corns a jostle".



It was to be a most fortunate accident for in the conversation which followed the fulsome apologies he became acquainted with a man who was to prove both a source of assistance and interest in the days to come. Henry Gunning a Fellow of Christ's college was returning to Cambridge out of term time to give evidence in a forthcoming dispute over navigation on the River Cam and was pleased to share his reminiscences of life in the university, town and county - which he expressed some interest in setting down for the benefit of future generations - and who better to proffer advice than the renowned compiler of the Pickwick Papers!

Soon however both became aware of another of their companions - a young mother who had been visiting her baby's undergraduate father in London to the very great surprise of that gentleman who was quite unaware that his extra-curricular activities had been so rewarded. "The infant's shrill squales showed signs of a lamentable uneasiness to the great offence of the nostrils of the whole company; I popped my head out of one of the coach windows for the benefit of air and rid for a mile with my head out of the bung hole". In that way did they arrive at Puckeridge and the grave of one of the greatest of coachmen

4

"Alas Poor Dick" : the words incribed on a plain marble slab caused Pickwick to pause in Puckeridge churchyard. Nearby stood Nahum Noggins from whom was gleaned some detail of the man who lay beneath - one of the greatest coachmen of his - or any other - day. Richard Vaughan, son of a Newmarket publican first saw the light of day in a stable.

At 14 he was employed as a stable boy at the Greyhound inn and about then lost both parents in quick succession. From then on he was thrown on to his own ingenuity and was often seen sauntering along the Beacon course mimicking the different cries of the jockeys, black-legs or betters.

At 18 he was apprenticed to the driver of the Cambridge Union coach and stayed for two years giving out parcels, cleaning the pannels, acting as book keeper and generally genning up on every aspect of stagecoach detail.

Soon he got a job as post boy at the Eagle Inn, Cambridge and here acquired a habit of drinking to excess. Friends warned him of the consequence and Dick resolved to give up, so next day when en route from Cambridge to Huntingdon his horse stopped - as it always had - at the "Cat and Bagpipes" Dick would have none of it and whipped the animal past. "Well done resolution, you deserve a glass for that" - so back he went to indulge himself with a jar!

Then he got a chance on the "Telegraph" coach which was just starting and his genius at driving became quickly recognised. Of course the old hands were annoyed at being outclassed by this new "Johnny Raw or bang-up Jessamy" - he was called a hoax, a rum quiz - even his

unrivaled method of spitting through his teeth at any given time or distance was condemned and his whistling likened to that of a jackass

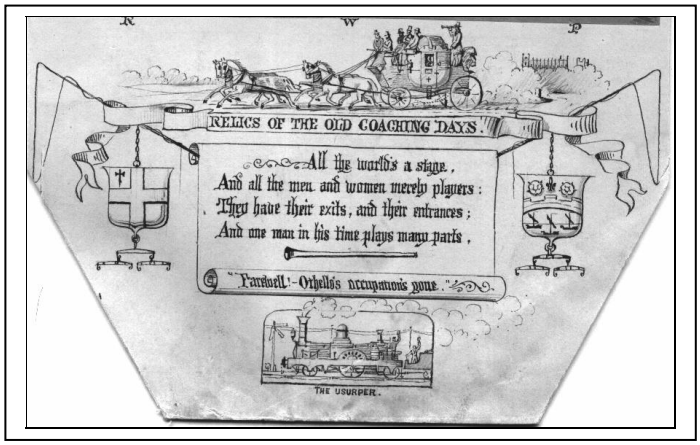
When aged 30 Dick married Susan Spoke, a farmer's daughter from Trumpington but it was not the bed of roses he'd hoped for. As he confided in a letter to Nahum "Mrs V ar'nt exactly the mare as suits me - the moment she feels the whip off she goes and no one can stop her - but she is sound in wind and limb and a famous breeder - alas Noggins though I have the whip-hand on the coach Mrs Vaughan has it in the home". Talking of whips Dick once wagered he could cut a fly from off his wife's nose at a distance of 12 yards ...

Richard was no portrait - though a sketch appears in the Scrapbook. Face like a plum pudding, eyes so deep set in his head they always appeared busy looking for his nose and his body gave the impression of a fillet of veal set upon crutches. But on the road dressed in his grey upper Benjamin, white top boots and natty cravat he was truly master of his craft and earned his famous nick-name "Hell Fire Dick". Ironically when just 32 he fell from a gig at Puckeridge uttered the words "Dammee I'm done for" and died.

But it was more than stagecoach drivers who were in danger of dying at Puckeridge in 1838

5

Puckeridge was, he noted a thriving place - a perfect place to retire, and and open the small coaching inn he had always speculated on. And here was the ideal place - the Bell, long established with three parlours, kitchen and brewhouse. The spacious bedrooms which were essential for travellers, good cellarage, excellent stabling and yard. It was available to let and should surely be a profitable venture



For Puckeridge was just 27 miles from London on the Great North Road to Huntingdon and a point of considerable cross-country communication. Indeed his own coach, the Kings Lynn Union was pausing here for a change of horse before taking, not the long uphill drag to Royston, but the alternative route through Barkway to his destination Cambridge. Further more Puckeridge was likely to be the first stage on the Northern and Eastern railway from London, even now in progress. Certainly it was worth consideration.

He raised the question of the onrushing railway with one of his fellow travellers who was adamant - it would attend the most ruinous consequences to the inhabitants of those villages and towns in the thoroughfares of the country.

His companion had previously journeyed on the Birmingham and Manchester road observing the vast number of unemployed peasantry standing at every corner of the different towns and villages through which they passed. Many were industrious men who had been accustomed to obtaining a livelihood by means of the coaches and waggons formerly running on that road. He had stayed at a good second-rate inn but when he had entered the travellers room where all had so recently been activity and high spirit he was truly horrified at the desolation which prevailed and the gloom and melancholy which depicted themselves in every countenance

"What cold meat do you have in the house" he'd asked. "None sir came the reply. "Can't you get us a chop?" - "We don't know where to get such a thing. Nobody kills any meat now for we have no company, they all go by railway"

The landlord obviously once a man of business was now all that was hopeless and despairing. "Sir I occupy this house at an immense rent. I took it three or four years ago when we were doing a most flourishing trade. Until within the last fortnight one hundred horses have stood in my stables at a guinea a year each, now only 2 remain. Fifty coaches stopped here daily, not above one in ten now comes this road. I kept 8 or 10 ostlers, a boy is not now employed above half this time. I had ten or twelve maid servants, and now have but one. What am I to do?"

That question could not be answered - but certainly retiring to a roadside inn suddenly lost its charm - though there was an excellent example of such an establishment just down the road

6

The Kings Lynn Union was not one of those frantic stagecoaches which dashed along at an average speed of 11 mph, changing teams of horses in less than a minute before charging on for another ten miles of so.

A more leisurely pace prompted more leisurely conversation amongst those cooped up inside and a number of names were recorded in the Pickwickian notebook, including that of the only female traveller whose young child soon however contrived to render polite discussions impossible.

It was a considerable relief when Barley came into view and the coach stopped for dinner. The menu was jotted in the notebook - hot roast beef - very prime, cold chicken already on the table - but scarce more than bones, roast lamb, hot or cold, green peas, new potatoes and apple tart. To be washed down - not with claret but with the landlords noted home brewed ale - renowned along the road. The price of the meal - 3 shillings and sixpence - was noted. Such expenses could add considerably to the cost of a journey - breakfast (ham and eggs) 2/3, tea (a few slices of thin bread and butter) 2/- and then the tips to the landlord on top. Some hosts added to their profits by hiding a travellers hat or gloves so that when the imperious driver called his passengers back to their places they had no option but to leave them behind and journey on fuming, though colder.

Pickwick had paid the full inside fare of 14/- but could not resist an invitation to join Thomas Cross on the box seat and learn something of the whip's wisdom about the countryside and characters of the road to Cambridge. He did however decline the inevitable question as to "whether he had his driving gloves on and would like to take the ribbons for a few miles" for he was all to aware that the driver would be expecting a tip of 7/- or half-a-guinea for the privilege

.

Although against the law and there had been a plentiful harvest of bruises and shocks gathered by passengers as a result of reckless driving by University gentlemen - rushing along at a reckless 20 mph with the coach rocking violently. One graduate, Harry Stevenson, had

however gone on to make his living as a professional coachman on the Brighton Road, his guard being replaced by a liveried servant whom he caused to attend to the passengers when the coach changed horses with a silver sandwich-box and offers of a superior sherry.

And then there was Sir St Vincent Cotton, Baronet, of Madingley Hall who had been educated at Christ Church Oxford. His love of gambling had reduced him from an income of £5,000 to penury. Now making his living driving the Brighton "Age" he was awaiting trial for assaulting the driver of a private coach who when blocked in overtaking at a turnpike gate had subsequently harassed the "Age", passing, slowing and speeding up to the great rage of its aristocratic coachman. His ancestral home was just a few miles away as the "Union" headed towards the leeches of Foulmire.

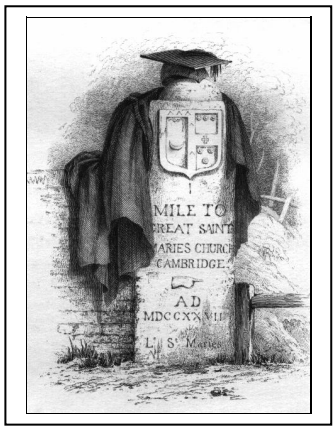
7

There was no doubt that the conversation of those gathered on the outside of the Kings Lynn Union stagecoach was much livelier than that inside.

Soon there was talk of local incidents - how two convicts being taken from Cambridge gaol to the Portsmouth hulks for transportation had taken advantage of the steep hills at Barkway where the coach was crawling at a snail's pace to jump off the roof and make a break for it - had it not been for one of the warders drawing his pistol and threatening to blow his brains out they could have been clean away - as it was they made the rest of the journey well and truly handcuffed.

They passed the lonely inn at Flint Cross and on towards Foulmire where the great mere provided many locals with their living - reed cutting, frog fishing - edible ones, "girt big fellers with yellow on the back" - and leech gathering - "yer take off yer breches an' wade in, yer see 'em coming at yer in thousands, girt black things, thousands of 'em an' they used to hang on yer legs in girt bunches and I used to pull 'em off, handfulls on 'em and sell 'em to the surgeons"

For information on Thriplow then William Thirby was the man - "been a shepherd 80 years, lived in the village 100 years, never had a days illness in his life - not till he died last April aged 108" - the notebook entry was duly crossed out! But what of Charles Butler of Harston - had his horse pinched out of his stable but got a ride on the Telegraph coach and spotted it on the road at Edmonton - Elijah Lilley was doing a year in gaol for that.



"Ah, and these old milestones were put up out of Mouse and Hare's causey fund by some gents at Trinity Hall - been there for over 120 years already - and over there - you can't see it from here - there's a mound with a monument to Gregory Wale from Shelford - you ought to see them". The name went down in the book. "And now there only one curate to two or three churches the parish clerk goes up there and waves his handkerchief if he's got a congregation - if not the curate carries on to the next place"

The "Union" carried on amidst sundry local lore - and what a tragedy it would be for the gardeners if the stagecoaches stopped - all those horses (one a mile on average) - that was

very good for the roses - but what about the dahlias - at Mr Widnall's just over at Grantchester there were six acres of them - thousands of new varieties produced each year and sent to France and Russia, Germany and America - mind you all this fighting in Canada between the French and the English that the papers are full of ...

But here in Cambridgeshire all seemed peaceful, the guard had had little to do save load and unload parcels but now on joining the main road from Royston to Cambridge Thomas Cross turned to him and ordered "Get out your yard of tin and blow up for the gate"

8

The early afternoon August calm of the Cambridgeshire countryside was shattered by the blast of the guard's coaching horn - though he had not musical skill enough to attempt more than a few notes of the popular "The days when we went Gipsying a long time ago".

There was little enough for a guard to do these days, now that highwaymen were largely a thing of the past - though there was now the modern version of highway villains - the professional informer. For by 1838 there were so many rules and restrictions governing every aspect of transport that it was almost impossible to travel any distance without transgressing some petty regulation - one too many passengers, luggage loaded too highly on the top of the coach, even the name painted on the wrong side of a tradesman's wagon, or at the wrong size. And everywhere there were people who earned their living by noting the discrepancies and collecting at least a part of the resulting fine.

A Guard needed to keep his ears alert too - for the soft whistle from a roadside copse which would bring the coach to an unscheduled stop whilst a sack containing poached hare, or poached pheasant - or poached anything else for that matter - was secreted under his seat to be dropped off at a roadside inn. Such small perks were essential if a man were to eke a living from such a job - and with them a very good living it was too, with many taking advantage of the extra services such a respected man of the road could offer.

"Where is that cold hearted wretch - planted in his vile little cot like a spider in his den, ready to pounce out upon every passenger and extract his odious dues. No feeling of remorse or sympathy has he for any fellow-mortal. It may be a wedding party rolling merrily along to church, it may be a funeral train, the parson or country surgeon, a set of ladies or gentlemen caracoling forth for pleasure - or a set or dull patient carrier wagons heaving slowly on their laborious mission. No matter who it may be, what it can be, or how or whence it came - this atrocious tollman is sure to present his harsh visage and demand payment!".

But of the keeper of the Hauxton turnpike gate there was no sign. There was no doubt that since the first Act of Parliament had been obtained to repair the road from Cambridge to Royston in the 1790s things had improved. With the weighing machine here it was possible to keep better check on the heavy carts doing damage, and varied tolls depending on the breadth of the cart's wheels were duly set out on the noticeboard beside the gate - Pickwick noted them down ... fourpence for every ass drawing - though Thomas Cross told him of the carter at Lt Shelford who had four asses on his wagon - but lifted two of them into the cart before he got to the turnpike and so reduced his bill.
Without the keeper there could be no payment, and without the gate being opened there could be no further progress.

9

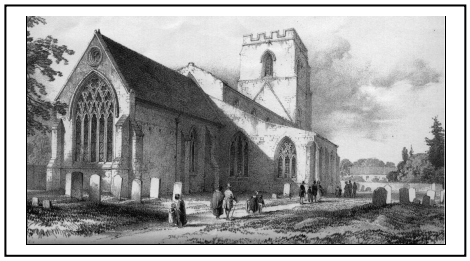
Sitting fuming in the August sun beside the deserted turnpike gate outside Hauxton the driver of the Kings Lynn Union instructed his guard to give yet another blast on the horn and to repeat the process at the front and back of the tollkeepers cottage. The Company had paid the necessary mileage duty on its declared number of passengers as well as the 1d a mile duty on the coach itself - and the least they could expect was to have the turnpike gate opened when they got there.

Perhaps something was amiss - it could be a dangerous and lonely job - indeed at Chettisham gate the other side of Ely three men had assaulted the keeper and stolen £30 from the cupboard in his bedroom - and he'd been robbed in October 1837 as well.

Thomas Cross considered the options - he could break the lock, or lift the entire gate off its hinges - but he'd heard Pickwick rattling on about an inside passenger called Henry Gunning and knew a Francis John Gunning was one of the Trustees for this road - it was too much of a risk.

Another blast on the Guard's horn, together with furious lashings on the keeper's casement windows with his driving whip finally produced some response from within and a shuffling and fumbling old pikeman appeared, obviously very drunk, dressed in trousers and shirt only with his braces dangling about him - "Got up before you found yourself this morning did you". "No sauce from no boys ain't been breeched above a twelve-month". "Stick to Old Tom and leave the brandy alone - if we'd been a Mail coach you'd have been fined a penalty of 40/- for the gate not being opened ..."

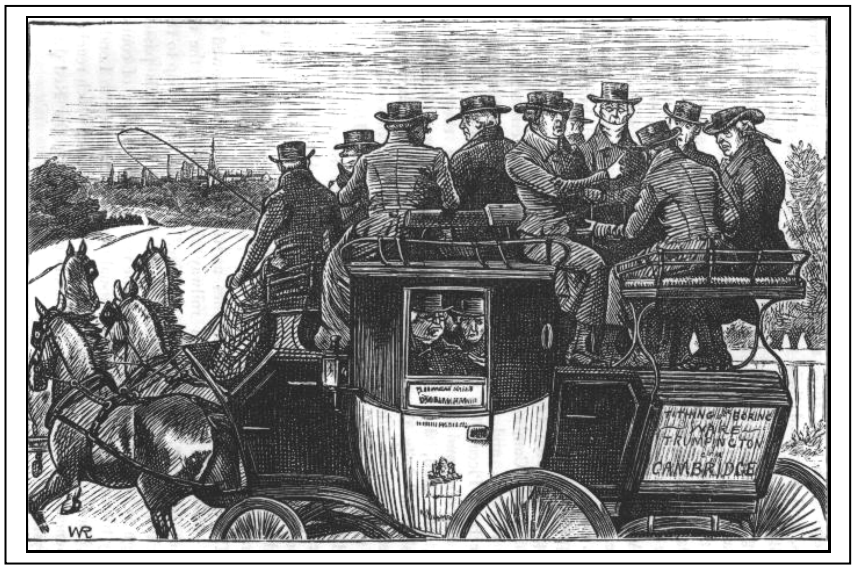
The reply was lost amidst the sound of hooves and the rattle of wheels as the Kings Lynn Union headed, surely, non-stop for Cambridge.



Except that it came to another halt in Trumpington. "I'll be leaving you here sir", said Thomas Cross - now very polite - to his passengers as he held out his hand for the customary "knock" of 1/6. One of the inside gentlemen proffered only a single shilling on which he looked with disdain, then spat and turned in his hand - "for luck and in 'ope it'll grow".

The prospect of abandonment so near and yet so far from their destination was alleviated at the sight of another of the Company's coaches journeying towards them. It pulled up nearby, the coachman dismounted and collected his belongings. A brief conversation ensued - something about an unaccustomed rattle, the off-side lead horse pulling to the right (neither of which Pickwick had noticed) and the quality of the passengers.

Then Thomas crossed the road, cracked his whip and set off back to London whilst the new coachman climbed up alongside Pickwick and commenced his own return journey to Kings Lynn,
the spires of Cambridge clearly visible before them.

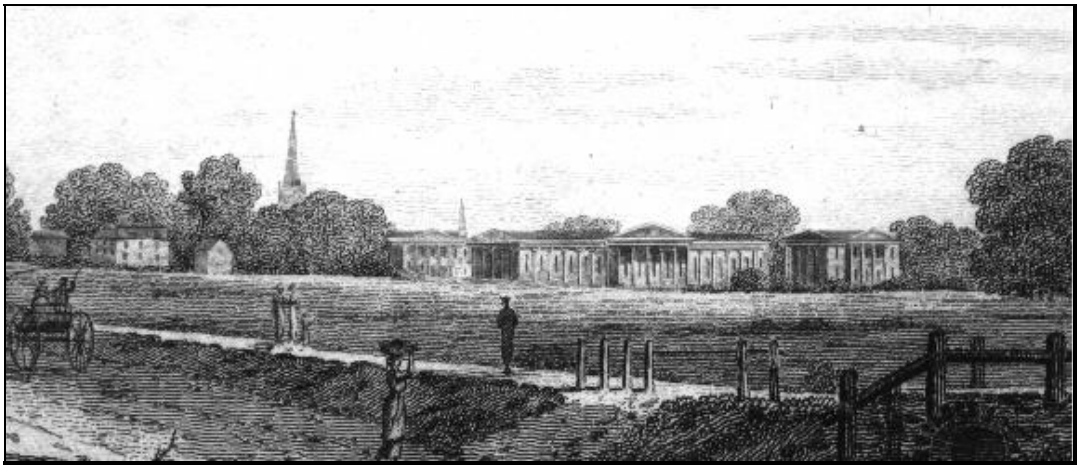


10

As his stagecoach traversed the last mile from Trumpington Pickwick became convinced that he had boarded the wrong vehicle. His expedition was to Cambridge - this could not be Cambridge.

He reached for his guidebook - discovered amongst the other papers in the newly-discovered parcel. It was not the most-up-to-date volume certainly - but who needed a new book to describe an old place. He knew that Cambridge was ancient - ancient walls, fine buildings, an air of antiquity - but this place was an immense building site.

Lines of raw terraced houses rose amongst the open fields on his right hand side - a New Town whose streets, he was told, commemorated his late Majesty King George IV, his Coronation and of course his Queen (though Caroline of Brunswick had never been even allowed to the ceremony - perhaps Cambridge folk had took her side in that most scandalous relationship which had proved such interesting reading in the newspapers just a few years earlier).



Beyond he could see the massive pile that was Downing College, builders busily labouring - as they were on the Fitzwilliam Museum whose foundation stone was just a year or so old, whilst new stones proclaimed what looked like a church, but was instead the University's Pitt Press opened just 5 years earlier in 1833. Pembroke and Corpus colleges - old foundations but with quite recent frontages - and an open ditch running in front of them, the coach's passage being hindered by a flock of sheep being driven south from the market at St Ives.

Even the long-anticipated view of the great Chapel of King's College was obscured by a new Gothic-style screen and beyond that even more building alongside the Senate House where a new University Library was in progress. The notebook records his feeling - was there nothing the builders had not tampered with in this nineteenth century!

A newspaper cutting chronicles the events that followed.

"*Coach accident. On Thursday afternoon last an accident happened to the Lynn Union coach ... about 3 o'clock with the full number of passengers both inside and out and very heavily laden with luggage; it proceeded as far as St Mary's church when suddenly the off fore wheel came off, and the coach pitched over with great violence upon its side, breaking the pole and otherwise damaging it. The coachman (Mr Walker) was severely bruised on his side and obliged to be conveyed home. One young lady was forced with great violence from her seat*

and pitched upon her head on the stones on the other side of the coach. Several of the passengers received various injuries but we are happy to say they are not of so very serious".

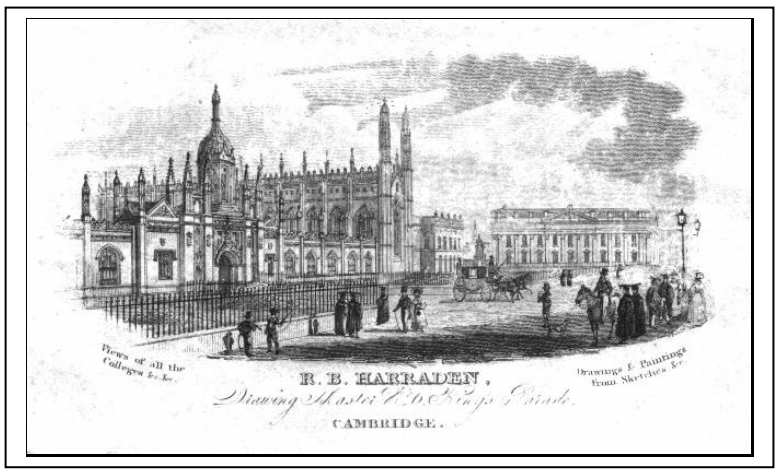
Amongst them was Pickwick. Sprawled breathless in the dust of a Cambridge street he was aware of the screams of the mother, and of the unnerving silence of her oh-so-noisy baby.

11

The almost deserted streets of Cambridge were immediately thronged. Not just with the loungers and scroungers that habitually gathered wherever there were stagecoaches to see but with people of all classes.

For this was a proper accident - not just some unwary outside passenger failing to duck as the coach swung under the low entrance gateway to the Blue Boar yard and being deposited on a heap in the dirt. This was a wrecked coach, frightened horses and hurt people right outside the Senate House

It brought workers from both the foundries of Charles Finch and Robert Headley on Market Hill, it brought William Mackintosh the brazier, shoppers from Brimley and Bond's grocers, from Sharman's toy warehouse, Eaden's drapers in Market Street - even smokers from Bacon's the tobacconist, puffing as they ran.



Those on King's Parade were out in an instance - happy Mr Sadd the silversmith and Mrs Greef - mourning her plumber husband, died not a month since. Mary Crisp the confectioner was there, Robert Roe the printseller, Deck the chemist - anxious to see whether he could assist (or sell some of his lotions and potions) - whilst some said even Harraden had brought out his sketchpad.

All were anxious to give advice - Sam Parkhouse the vet in Tennis Court Lane could see to the horses - though Sparrow in Jesus Lane was nearer; Hunnybun in Sidney street could soon sort out any damage to the coach - well he built enough himself

The constabulary arrived in the presence of Superintendent John Titterton. He sent messengers scampering for John Okes, the surgeon in Trinity street to attend to the injured coachdriver and look over the assorted bruises of the other gentlemen passengers.

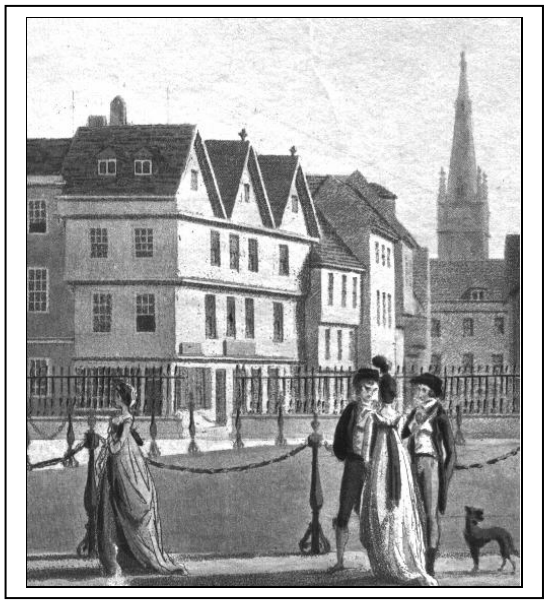
As to the woman - no lady her - for she was all to well known to himself and indeed the University proctors. She lived in the notorious Barnwell area off Newmarket Road and earned whatever money she made in the oldest of professions. She was unmarried, the baby a bastard and the bastard was dead.

It was just as well, for with the new Union in Mill Road still not finished, and the parishes selling off their own workhouses everything was uncertain as to the proper procedures. As

for the body - there would be an open grave soon enough where it could be quietly disposed of and who would grieve - certainly not the undergraduate father able now to continue his studies unstained.

The important thing was that the luggage would be removed and taken to the Hoop in Sidney Street where passengers could collect it presently.

12



His clothing stained by Cambridgeshire dust and with every bone in his body aching from the constant jolting of the stagecoach Pickwick was assisted to his feet by far too many helpers each anxious to feast their eyes on such a famous personage as himself whose arrival outside the Senate House in such a manner would surely be a tale worth the telling in many a local tavern for many a day to come.

Rescued from the throng by his fellow-traveller, Henry Gunning exerting his Academic authority Pickwick found himself bundled into Thomas Stephenson's adjacent bookshop where to his surprise he found himself already the subject of conversation echoing around the tightly-packed shelves. "Pickwick is humbug - far inferior to Nicholas Nickelby, now being serialised by Chapman & Hall - who catches the vice and folly of the middling and lower classes exactly ..."

Declining an invitation to meet the pontificator - Librarian of one of the colleges and obviously a man of little taste - Pickwick bade farewell to his rescuer. As repair teams arrived at the shattered Union stagecoach he took the opportunity to slip out and start his search for accommodation.

There was certainly no shortage of beds to be found in Cambridge out of term time when the town was virtually closed down. The Bull Inn could offer every requisite for comfort and convenience with most welcome warm, cold and shower-baths adjoining the bed-chambers. It stood alongside King's College and had been rebuilt just a decade earlier - but it was also the meeting place for the Bull Book Club and he had heard quite enough of Cambridge's opinion of his work.

The Eagle in Bene't street had an unenviable reputation as the scene of far too much political activity, the memories of the notorious "Rutland Club" which under banker John Mortlock had ruled the town for so many years were still too strong and with a new election pending this was a place to avoid

In Trinity street were the Blue Boar and the old established Sun family and posting house where James Hunnybun promised handsomely furnished rooms and good wines. Just around the corner near the quaint round Holy Sepulchre church was the George commercial hotel with a commodious room set entirely apart for the use its travelling gentlemen - perhaps ideal for jotting down an account of his expenditure - and of his explorations.

Further along Bridge street towards Jesus Lane stood the famous Hoop Hotel with its own assembly rooms where plays were performed but with so many coaches thundering in and out every hour of day or night life there would be all hustle and bustle. It was moreover haunted by the memory - if not the ghost - of one of Cambridge's most notorious characters. Pickwick paused in his progress to learn the gory details.

13

"General Gordon used to haunt the Hoop Hotel, sir - before he died. 'Cos he weren't always a General, sometime he was an Admiral - that depended on what clothes he got hold of - you should have seen his in his get-up and his huge cocked-hat - Cambridge will never see his like again"

The ostler at the Hoop Hotel was in full flow on a tale he had obviously told to many a visitor, confident that it would result in a tip of a penny or two. Nevertheless this was precisely the sort of story Pickwick had come to find and he was happy to play along.

"His real name was James but we all called him Jemmy and he had a good education in what they call the Classics - Latin and Greek and all that - he even used to write essays for the students for a small payment of course. He went into the law but soon got fed up with that. Here I've got a little
leaflet he wrote about lawyers ... 'Soldiers only kill, Lawyers make life a continued scene of torture ... they even pillage misery of its last poor mite'

"They say he fell in love with a beautiful girl - even fixed the date for the marriage - but she ran off with a rich undergraduate. Mind you Jemmy was well-off till he turned to the drink. He used to have lots of friends at the university who would always invite him to their parties for he could tell a good story and sing real well - but afterwards you should have heard him roaring out scraps of songs and quoting poetry in the streets - keeping half the town awake.

"Mind you he was a real wit. Once he went up to the Bishop of Bristol - 'I hope my lord you will give me a shilling!' he said to him. 'If you can find me a greater scoundrel than yourself I will give you half-a-crown' the Bishop replied. So old Jemmy he went up to his worst enemy the Senior Beadle (name of Beverley), he bowed real low and he said 'the Bishop of Bristol is seeking for you everywhere sir'. Old Beverley goes running off to the Bishop, Jemmy close behind and of course the Bishop has no idea what Beverley wanted - not till Jemmy pops up and says 'I think Bishop you owe me half-a-crown' - he got it too!

"But Jemmy really got too bad - but he knew so much gossip about everybody and was quite prepared to shout it from every street corner - that everybody was scared of him (even the magistrates). Once they did gang up and got him send down to London, but he came back a

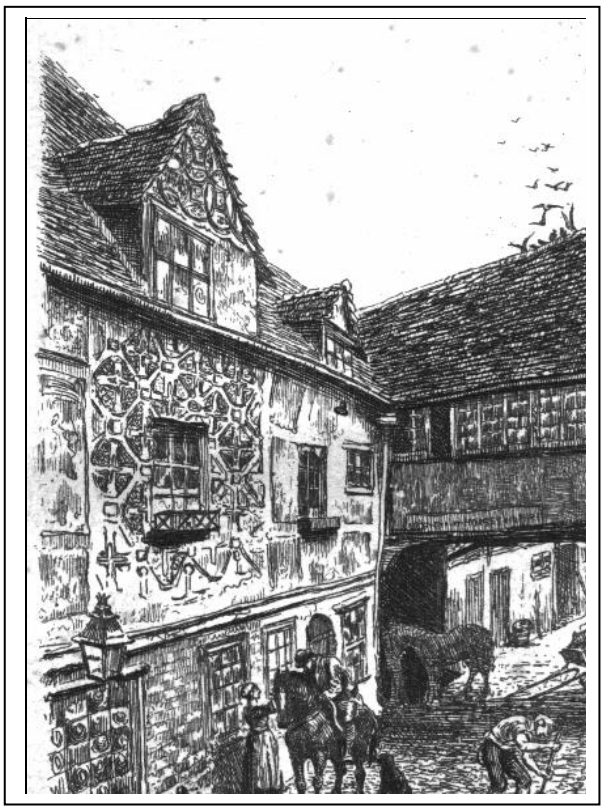
real destitute. He used to sleep here in the stables only one night when he was particularly drunk he slipped and broke his thigh - well we thought he was just ranting as usual and threw him in the
outhouse. Next day though we put him on a shutter and carried him to Addenbrooke's Hospital - but he was so filthy they wouldn't take him in. So we took him to the workhouse at Barnwell where he died in September 1825 ... "

A good tale, worth a whole silver sixpence before the rumble of wheels along Bridge Street sent the ostler back to his work and Pickwick back to his search for a bed

14

Pickwick turned his back on the Hoop Hotel and followed his nose towards the town centre. Preoccupied with the weariness of his limbs he had passed the Lord Nelson - standing back from the street on his left-hand side - before he properly noticed it. He resolved not to turn again but plodded on.

He saw a large and modern church and asked its name of a woman filling her buckets from a pump which drew its water from below the graveyard. "Simeon's church, sir" was the reply - an odd name for a church, worth investigating later - he jotted it down in his notebook.



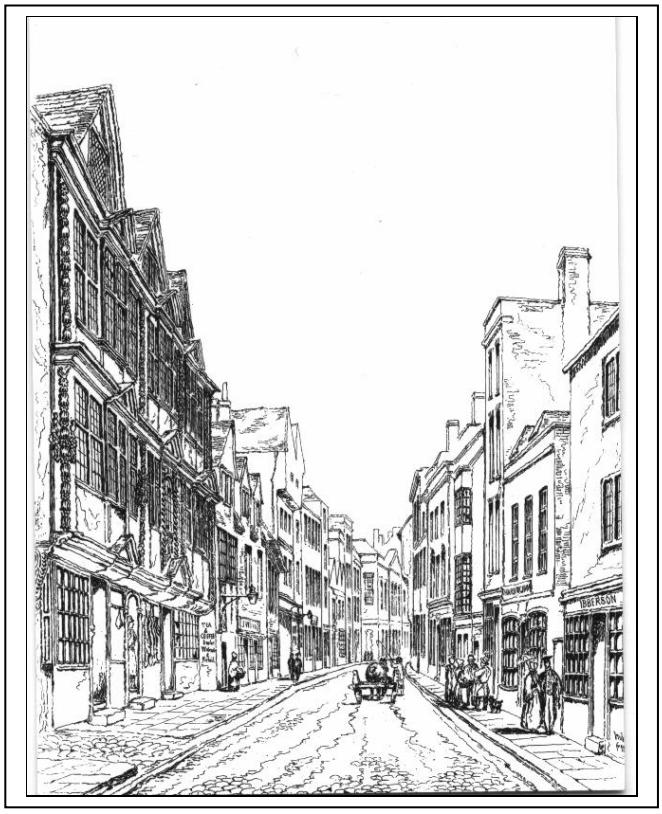
Then on his right he spotted an amazing street packed full of ancient shops and inns, seemingly unchanged for centuries. Half way along he could spot a fine hostelry - the Red Lion commercial inn but here, just on the corner was one finer. The Wrestlers Arms seemed to his eye Jacobean, he admired the profuse carving, the bay windows - though sadly the bottom floor had been spoiled by new shop fronts. He peered into the courtyard noting the high gabled bay-windows, their tips carved with minarets of wood in various fantastic shapes. An open staircase encouraged him to venture in and investigate this antiquated structure

Sadly the inside failed to live up to the promise of the exterior, obviously run down and uncared for. Nevertheless it was a place to ponder and whilst pondering he would take a glass of gin and water. He chanced into conversation with a young man who gave his name as John Williams and was celebrating the death of his uncle by which he had become the possessor of an immensity of money. An acquaintance, Thomas Pepper, joined their party and conversation flowed most fluently - though about what Pickwick seems to have become forgetful as one gin-and-water followed the first into his empty stomach.

There was, he was told, something of a crime epidemic in Cambridge at the moment and his new friend, glimpsing the sovereigns which Pickwick fumbled for as he paid for yet more liquor cautioned him about being too open with his cash. Better for all if it were bundled up secure and placed in his fob pocket - and as Pickwick's fingers were now somewhat less under control than usual why he would do it for him. Pickwick watched the cash securely wrapped and carefully pocketed the parcel.

The Wrestlers was noted for its chops - John would go and order for all three of them, whilst Thomas excused himself to visit the offices. Pickwick became aware of knowing smiles from others in the room and tapped the parcel in his fob pocket, relieved to find it still secure. Just one more glass would settle his stomach. Other observers spoke for many months of the stranger's expression when he unwrapped his money and discovered that the sovereigns and notes he
expected to find there had changed into just thirteen pence in copper! He dashed into the dining room and out into the yard, he looked high and low but of his new friends there was no sign.

15



Pickwick stood dejected in Petty Cury, tired, hungry, somewhat befuddled, bedless, friendless and now virtually penniless. The town and its trade continued to ebb around him, nobody seeming to have a concern for one more stranger down on his luck.

It was obvious that one did not have to possess money to live in Cambridge - the ragged figures on street corners and inn yards were proof positive of that, but he would not stoop to beggary. Perhaps he could use his good name to gain credit, but traders here would still be suspicious following the affair of the young Chippenham schoolboy, Abraham Cawston twenty years earlier.

The Cambridge Chronicle of 24th October 1817 had broken the story of how "one of the most extraordinary instances of good fortune that perhaps ever occurred to any human being had fallen to the lot of a young gentleman". The lad had been travelling by coach to his school in Shrewsbury when he had chanced into conversation with an elderly gentleman. Impressed with his honesty the old man "told the youth that he had been long looking for a person to whom he might leave his fortune, and that he was the object of his election".

His benefactor died shortly after and although not willing to broadcast his new wealth the lad had nevertheless been anxious to have his father - a malster living at Chippenham - made more comfortable and sought the advice of Mr Weatherby, an eminent Newmarket solicitor. Quite how it became known to the Cambridge Chronicle that his fortune amounted to more than £500,000 was a mystery but it was certain that he had an account at Hammond & Eaden's bank at Newmarket with over £1,100 in it - and had tipped the bank-clerk 20 shillings|

He he gained his brother admission to Emmanuel college as a Fellow-Commoner with an income of £600 a year. Soon it became common knowledge that the Empress of Russia was paying ten times that amount annually as interest on a loan of over £100,000. Then there were the diamonds, the ships, the estates in South America - all to be his on 1st January 1818

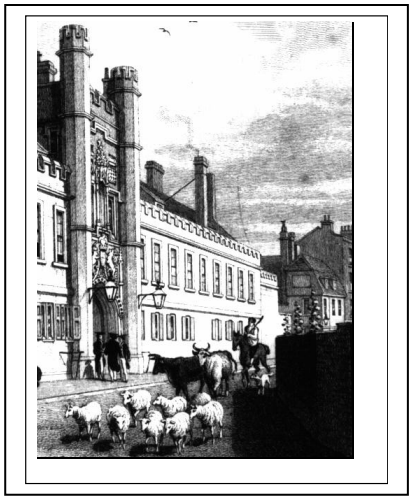
No wonder relatives, shops, wine-sellers, Newmarket traders and others were anxious to advance him credit and cash, safe in the knowledge that all would be amply repaid at the turn of the year ... only before the year was out the papers were once more trumpeting the name of the Fortunate Youth - this time as an imposter. "In the present dearth of news the editors of the several papers have served up everything to the Public, not only every thing that has been said but every thing that has been conjectured". There was not a scrap of truth in any of it ...

But surely Pickwick himself knew a potential benefactor - the academic gentleman he had met on the coach. He recollected the name - Henry Gunning - but where would he be found. There had been some mention of a college, but which one.

16

Pickwick pulled his battered guidebook from his coat pocket and perused the pages seeking to refresh his memory. Why did there have to be so many colleges in Cambridge - 16 old ones as well as the new edifice of Downing rising in the open fields south of the Town. And why did they all have so many names - Bene't or Corpus Christi, St Peter's or Peterhouse, Gonville Hall or Caius - and why should that be pronounced Keys - by now he was becoming maudlin.

Magdalene in the Castle-end with its Pepys library - no surely no other diarist could contemplate publishing their memoirs from such a place ... Jesus? - it was something like that - ah, here it was - Christ's



A street urchin pointed out the way - "Just around the corner Master - don't you know anything - foreigners" - and there stood a great gate surmounted by richly carved fantastic beasts - Yales his guide said. Pickwick felt cowered - could he really enter such a place - but he had faced stronger challenges, picked up his courage and ventured inside.

Suddenly the bustle of the street died away and he was in a different world of tranquillity and studiousness where a man could contemplate the mysteries of the universe or a piece of Greek prose. A gardener pointed out the door he must enter and the room he must seek - "you'll be welcome sir, provided the oak's not sported". A staircase led creakingly upwards to the room described. Not one but two doors faced him, one standing open, the other soundly shut, of the oak there was no sign.

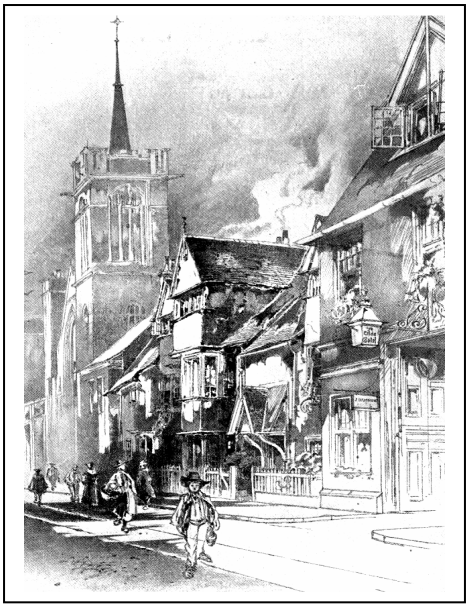
He had not come so far to be deflected by a missing tree, cleared his throat and tapped. Of the reaction to his knock and the conversation that resulted he later confessed only a hazy recollection - due perhaps to the copious draughts of sherry with which he was plied. He found himself the possessor of a ten pound note, a letter to Mortlock the banker (though with a caution to avoid the apple-seller in the tent outside) and a cheque for the princely sum of twenty-five pounds. Pickwick did recollect a pledge to provide his benefactor, Henry Gunning, with an introduction to young Mr Dickens who could surely assist with the publication of Gunning's reminiscences - well he had played a small part in his own literary achievement.

He also remembered a piece of advice - to head out of town if he wanted to stay. Thus when he finally re-emerged into the real and bustling world he turned his back on Petty Cury and strode along the dusty thoroughfare which led south. One more college - Emmanuel - and there it stood on the edge of an extensive cricket-field - a fine new hotel proudly bearing the arms of the University. It had fifteen rooms, a Smoakey, billiard room, "extensive and pleasing views affording a most airy and salubrious retreat for valetudinarians or families visiting Cambridge". Here John Barefoot would welcome those gentry who could afford the luxury he offered - but it would not suit Pickwickl

17

Pickwick gazed across Parker's Piece to the gaunt castle-like gaol alone in the empty fields; he needed accommodation, he wanted to meet characters and that building offered both, but that was not for him.

Just opposite the University Arms stood another gaunt and depressing edifice, its purpose unknown but obviously frightful, but almost alongside was a gem of a place - a mass of gables and windows, higgledy-piggledy construction and with an aura of hospitality seeming to permeate from it.



He crossed the road and found the inn he had sought. For if one was to relish the delights of a town like Cambridge three things were essential - an old house whose story was told at least in some portion of its architecture; a generous table, and comfort without glitter administered by a host of the old school versed in his calling and proud of it

From the moment he entered the Castle Inn he felt at home; a courteous welcome, despite his absence of luggage still awaiting collection from the Hoop. He ascended a staircase whose every step seemed to tell tales of those who had trod that way before and was shown into a room whose ancient oriel window gave a glimpse into the gardens of Emmanuel college opposite. From below came the sounds of lively conversation emanating from the Smoking Room whilst a melody was wafting from the finest Commercial room he had discovered throughout his journeys where a concert was already in progress.

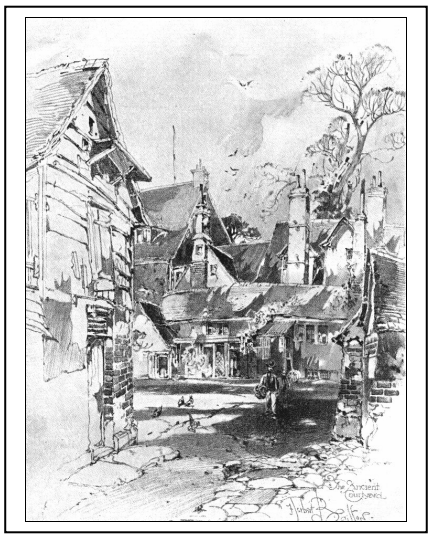
All that was needed to make his enjoyment complete was a fine table with fine food finely prepared - and the Castle could supply that too. A cod cooked in he moment of perfect firmness followed soup of such a character as might be expected from a chef who had worked at Queens' college; a fine turkey complemented by the sausages for which Cambridge was famous followed by baked apples and cream, washed down with a wine of twice the quality and half the price he would expect to find in grander establishments.

And around him the conversation flowed - of horses and Newmarket races, of how Oliver Cromwell himself had slept in this very inn - though for proof there was but little - although it was certain that his boots were here in Cambridge, just as Dick Turpin had himself lodged at the inn just opposite the other Castle - the one at the other end of town where he would have been most welcome to stay a night or two. There was talk of a forthcoming fair which would

see the town alive with traders, of the scandelous doings about the Market Hill ... on and on it went.

Then at the bar he noticed his acquaintances from the Wrestler's Inn and heard them explaining to a prosperous looking gentleman how Cambridge was full of villains and how he ought to wrap his money and place it in his fob pocket ...

18



Confronted with the villains who had so cleverly relieved him of virtually all his ready cash Pickwick did what any right-minded man of his calibre would do - he made a hasty exit through the Castle's back door.

He found in the inn courtyard, illuminated by the light which seeped from the various rooms which backed onto it. Gabled outhouses supported by massive beams, the peace of the night disturbed by the occasional cough, stamping of hooves and all the associated sounds which come when horses are as well and contentedly stabled as their owners.

Somewhere in some hayloft there must be a groom, an ostler, or inn-servant - somebody who could guide him to an officer of the law. He called and cooed and was met with more stamping and coughing, more rustling and a voice at his elbow.

"Police, sir - yes we've had police now sir these past two years - ever since Charles Humfrey the banker was assaulted - two men sneaked up on him about midnight one Saturday when he was going home but Humfrey struggled and squirmed so much that they only got L4 from his purse and he screamed so loud they just threw him down - left his watch behind - and run off. He got the Council to call a meeting to establish a Police force. That took two years talking about it - but that's quick for our town council here sir.

"Mind you some say that he's the biggest villain in town - and he's Mayor now you know. He'd built some stables near his house which had even got rooms especially for grooms - he thought the University gentlemen would be glad to have somewhere they could leave their horses - at a price - but it never caught on. So when they were looking for a police station why he rented out some of his own outbuildings and gets £50 a year rent for it ... where's that - don't you know Humfrey's mansion sir - out near the Garden of Eden - just across Parker's Piece"

The prospect of a night-time journey beyond the emptiness of the Piece - with the greater blackness of the town gaol and the eery outline of the wrecked windmill on the corner of Mill Road adding to the general malevolent air of this most frightful town - did not appeal. Was there no way he could contact a policeman

"Of course if you was a University gentleman sir, you wouldn't need the town bobbies - they look after their own - and they've got that private prison right next door sir - you must have noticed it - we call it the Spinning House - and you ought to hear what goes on there ... I can tell you a tale or two ..."

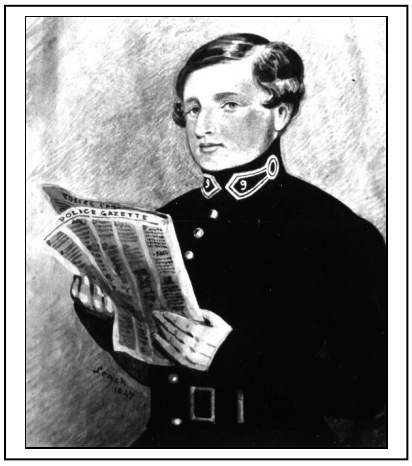
By now Pickwick was becoming agitated - his worldly wealth was in somebody else's pocket and although he would dearly love to learn the secrets of the Spinning House this was not the time. He had to find a constable, and quickly!

19

"Well the police are supposed to patrol the centre every twenty minutes" the Castle inn servant continued "- but if that's so how come them villains burgled Saunder's perfume shop in Bene't street - they picked the lock in the front door, spent upwards of an hour ransacking the place - took the hair brushes, tortoishell combs - everything - a real bulky load - and the police never saw nothing ... Mind you the streets are so dark - council spends a fortune on street lights and half of them don't work properly - old Grafton the gas-man is always getting told off but that don't do no good - you see the flame is the proper size when the lamplighter first lights it but then as he lights more so the flame goes down - and he don't go back and turn it up ... But we had less crime when there weren't no lights - cos it was so dark that when you walked the streets you couldn't see the nose in front of your face - so you couldn't see the grads on the other side of the street - and if you couldn't see them then you couldn't fight them ... stands to reason ...

"But if you do want a policeman sir I should try the Bird Bolt - on the corner of Downing street. Go around the back but don't say I sent yer"

A cuttings from the Cambridge Chronicle survives in Pickwick's scrapbook to tell the story. "A man named John Williams was taken before the magistrates of this town on a charge of robbing a countryman of the name of Randle of a £5 note and seven sovereigns .. his companion however begged to be excused a little while that he might fetch a person to speak to his character. Permission having been given he decamped and has not since been heard of ...".



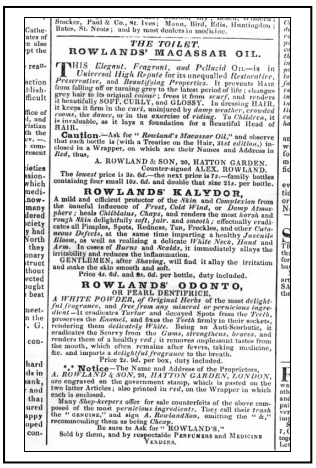
There is no mention of Pickwick either for it seems that he and Robert Flynn, Constable Number 6, had come to an agreement - Pickwick received back the money he had lost to Williams and Flynn's presence in the back room of a Temperance Hotel house - when he was due to have been on patrol - was never made public. Pickwick also gained a new friend from whom he was to learn much of the Cambridge underworld and its law enforcement officers.

By the time he finally wended his way upstairs, his candle casting shadows over the ancient walls which had housed so many characters over the centuries, forgotten to wash and snuggled down beneath the sheets of a comfortable bed Pickwick had every reason to be content with his first day's adventure. Before he fell into a deep slumber he recalled deserted turnpike gates, stagecoach accidents, dead babies, new buildings dominating an ancient town, the villainy he had suffered the hospitality he had enjoyed, the new friend he had made - and the wondrous things to be discovered from the comfort of his ancient inn ... but what was the story of the banker in the tent, and who was Betty - Gunning had said "remember Betty" and he'd almost forgotten ... how right he had been to choose not to visit Oxford - Oxford would be civilised, Cambridge was so much better.

20

Pickwick awoke in his bed at the Castle Hotel, refreshed but dishevelled in the shirt that had served him throughout the previous day and night. He washed before breakfast but could not shave - his razor was with all his other luggage awaiting collection from the Hoop Hotel in Sidney Street.

The first priority must be to find a barber to restore some semblance of civility to his features. Emerging into St Andrews street he sighted the premises of David Adams and made his way there.



Stocker, Paul & Co., St. Ives; Mann, Bird, Edis, Huntingdon; Bates, St. Neots; and by most dealers in medicine.

THE TOILET.

ROWLANDS' MACASSAR OIL.

THIS *Elegant, Fragrant, and Pellucid* OIL—is in *Universal High Repute* for its unequalled *Restorative, Preservative,* and *Beautifying Properties.* It prevents HAIR from falling off or turning grey to the latest period of life; changes grey hair to its original *colour*; frees it from *scurf*, and renders it beautifully SOFT, CURLY, and GLOSSY. In dressing HAIR, it keeps it firm in the *curl*, uninjured by *damp weather, crowded rooms*, the *dance*, or in the exercise of *riding*. To *Children*, it is invaluable, as it lays a foundation for a Beautiful Head of HAIR.

Caution.—Ask for "*Rowland's Macassar Oil*," and observe that each bottle is (with a Treatise on the Hair, 31*st edition*,) inclosed in a Wrapper, on which are their Names and Address in *Red*, thus,

A. ROWLAND & SON, 20, HATTON GARDEN.
Counter-signed ALEX. ROWLAND.

The *lowest* price is 3*s.* 6*d.*—the next price is 7*s.*—family bottles containing four small 10*s.* 6*d.* and double that size 21*s.* per bottle.

ROWLANDS' KALYDOR,

A mild and efficient protector of the *Skin* and *Complexion* from the baneful influence of *Frost, Cold Wind,* or *Damp Atmosphere*; heals *Chilblains, Chaps,* and renders the most *harsh* and *rough Skin* delightfully *soft, fair,* and *smooth*; effectually eradicates all Pimples, Spots, Redness, Tan, Freckles, and other *Cutaneous Defects*, at the same time imparting a healthy *Juvenile Bloom*, as well as realising a delicate *White Neck, Hand* and *Arm*. In cases of *Burns* and *Scalds*, it immediately allays the irritability and reduces the inflammation.

GENTLEMEN, after *Shaving*, will find it allay the irritation and make the skin smooth and soft.

Price 4*s.* 6*d.* and 8*s.* 6*d.* per bottle, duty included.

ROWLANDS' ODONTO,
OR PEARL DENTIFRICE,

A WHITE POWDER, of Original Herbs of the most *delightful fragrance*, and *free from any mineral or pernicious ingredient*—It eradicates *Tartar* and decayed *Spots* from the *Teeth*, preserves the *Enamel*, and fixes the *Teeth* firmly in their sockets, rendering them *delicately White*. Being an Anti-Scorbutic, it eradicates the Scurvy from the *Gums, strengthens, braces*, and renders them of a healthy *red*; it removes unpleasant tastes from the mouth, which often remains after fevers, taking medicine, &c. and imparts a *delightful fragrance* to the breath.

Price 2*s.* 9*d.* per box, duty included.

*** **Notice**—The Name and Address of the Proprietors, *A. ROWLAND & SON, 20, HATTON GARDEN, LONDON*, are engraved on the government stamp, which is pasted on the two latter Articles; also printed in *red*, on the Wrapper in which each is enclosed.

Many *Shop-keepers* offer for sale counterfeits of the above composed of the most *pernicious ingredients*. They call their *trash* the "GENUINE," and sign *A. Rowland&Son*, omitting the "&," recommending them as being *Cheap*.

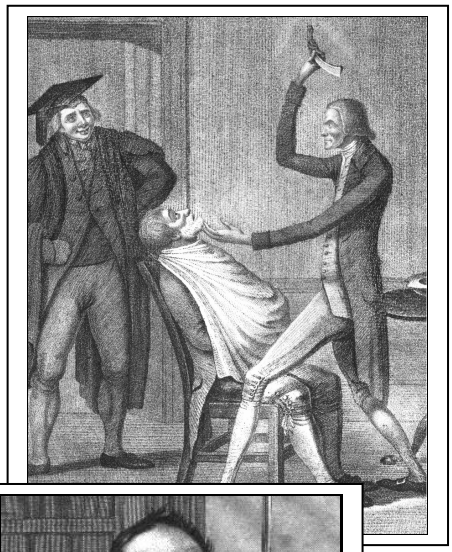
Be sure to Ask for "ROWLAND'S."

Sold by them, and by respectable PERFUMERS and MEDICINE VENDERS.

Whilst waiting for a somewhat rotund farmer-like figure to be completed he considered the potions now apparently essential for the well-groomed Victorian. Rowlands' Macassar Oil - elegant and fragrant - would restore, preserve and beautify his hair, prevent it from falling off or turning grey, and keep it beautifully soft, curly and glossy even when dancing or riding in damp weather. Rowlands' Odonto or pearl dentifrice - made from original herbs - would eradicate decayed spots from his teeth and scurvy from his gums whilst Kalydor would cure his pimples and impart a healthy juvenile bloom - a bit late for that - but when applied after shaving would remove irritation and make his skin smooth and soft.

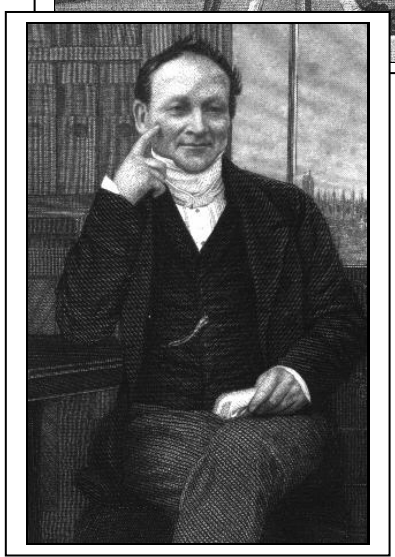
He was jolted from his contemplation by his turn in the barber's chair and an unusual question - would he care to shave himself?. Certainly not, but why. Adams explained.

"A gentleman, like yourself, came into the shop and said he wanted to borrow the razor and shave hisself - he said that barbers were likely to daub the lather across his mouth whereby he was in danger of taking a disease from some person labouring under an infectious disorder who had been previously lathered with the same brush. Anyway I let him have his way and when he was done he said how he had never shaved himself so well before - the brush was strong and good and the razor was excellent - he said he wanted to buy it off me. I told him - 'I know they are both good because I'm just returned from Addenbrooke's where I have been shaving two patients with them who are in the last stage of typhus fever' - the gentleman he just swooned away"



Almost before the tale was told the task was complete and Pickwick commended him on his speed. "That ain't nothing - you should have known old Robert Foster - hairdresser to Clare Hall about 50 years ago. He was a real character and they called him the 'Flying Barber' on account of his rapidity in conversation, in walking, and the exercise of his profession. He was so popular his customers clubbed together to buy him a silver basin - and it was no small honour for a stranger to say he had been shaved out of Foster's basin. There was a lot of gentlemen who lamented his passing in 1830".

"Mind you there are some people we'd be glad to see the back of - take the chap just come in - the best billiard player in Cambridge - at least so he says"



21

The new arrival at the barber's shop had ears sharp enough to hear the slightest kiss. "Billiards - I am tolerably proficient at that noble game and my billiard rooms - with a slate table I made myself - are acknowledged to be the best in the town. My customers of the very first order and hundreds of the best

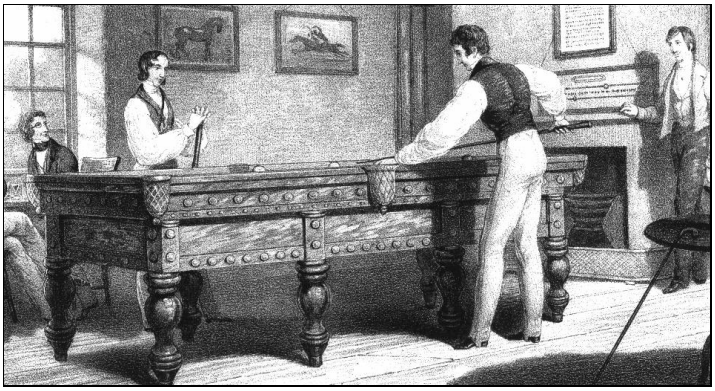
gentlemen players, now scattered over the earth's surface are 'graduates' (as I may say) of my establishment ..."

From the first moment of meeting Pickwick knew that he and his new acquaintance were not going to get along. For John Brown was one of those most tiresome people who proclaimed their own achievements in the most minute detail and yet had not the slightest time for those of anybody else.

"When I was landlord of the Fort St George on Midsummer Common - you know where the river Conservators' man lived who looked after the tolls and attended to the locks - I was a general favourite and brought round me an excellent connection. Why on a fine day we would take twelve pounds - an extraordinary sum. Well I had a bagatelle table and used to practice billiard strokes on it till I was properly accomplished.

"After I went bankrupt - but you know I soon was released from gaol - I bought an old wooden table and taught billiards to my fellow tradesmen. But then seven or eight Trinity men, the elite of their class, asked me to teach them Pool - and that night I earned a whole half-guinea

"So I decided to admit only University and banned gambling. But one University official decided to get the game banned and put me out of business. So I had little bells hung in the darkest corners of the rooms and I put a man with a dog-whistle just outside. When he saw the Reverend gentleman coming he'd blow the whistle, another man would pull the bells and the players bolted out through a window at the back which closed after them on a secret spring. At the same time we turned off the gas at the main so when this functionary entered the place was in total darkness and as still as death



"Being repeatedly foiled my enemy grew desperate and resorted to coming stealthily down upon my lookout. Although caught napping he still managed to blow his whistle which so exasperated the zealous Reverend that he gave him a right clout - which a couple of my lads witnessed. We took him off to court and got him convicted of assault and fined twenty shillings

"After that the all the Heads of the Colleges asked to meet me and I persuaded them to see things my way and they leave me alone now. You ought to visit my premises, they're not far from the Hoop Hotel, near the Round church"

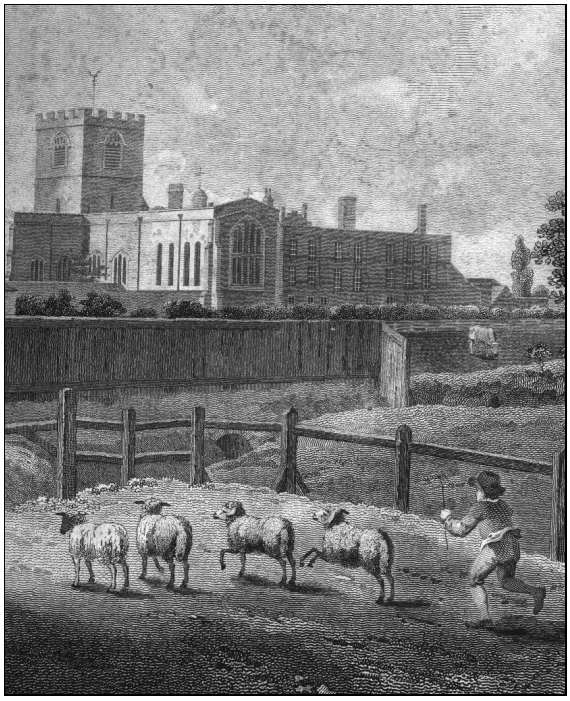
Pickwick had to make his way in that direction to collect his luggage, but somehow forgot to mention that fact.

22

Wherever he looked in Cambridge there seemed to be animals. If it was not dogs chasing horse drawing stagecoaches, carts or private carriages it was an immense traffic jam of cattle or sheep.

Thus St Andrew's street was once more blocked, the beasts everywhere. Pickwick wondered where they came from and whence they were bound

He contrived to engage in conversation a ten-year-old lad who was apparently in control of the flock: "My father he died of consumption and my mother had six of us children and my uncle he took us over but he was weak-minded, idle, more fond of his pipe and his cards and drink than he was business and he went bust. But my dad having been a butcher the other butchers gave us what we call 'the drove'



"The stock market is held at St Ives we have to rise about 3 o'clock on the Monday morning to be there, ready to mark the sheep purchased by the butchers, some with red-ochre and others with tar - everybody has their own mark. Then we take them from the pens and drive them to a paddock outside the town, lot after lot until we have collected the entire drove - that can take until twelve o'clock.

"Then we start out with perhaps 350 sheep and that is a weary lonely road when you're plodding along at less than two miles an hour. We frequently don't get to Cambridge till 9 o'clock at night, benumbed with cold. Then we leave the sheep in a place boarded round for the purpose and walk to our home - I live out Barnwell way. That's 18 hours of the most miserable and sickening work that man or boy ever engaged in. We have a supper of a mess of boiled milk, wash our feet and go to sleep.

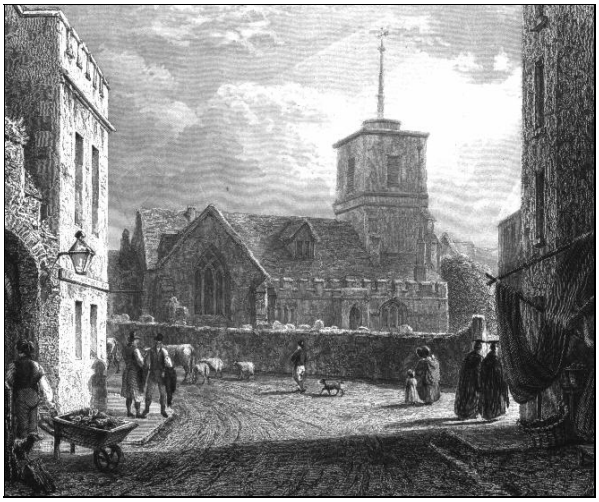
"Next morning we start off at 9 o'clock and draw off the sheep that belong to the different butchers and take them off in separate lots to their destination. We then drive small lots to separate villages around and on Wednesday or Thursday take others to Saffron Walden.

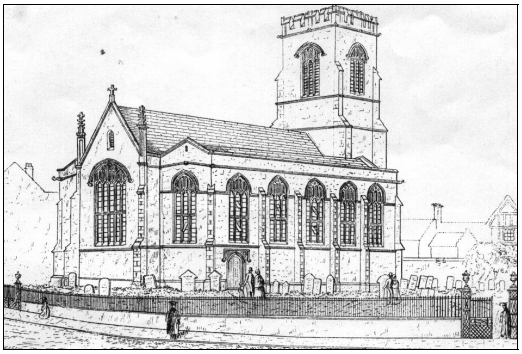
"That's bad enough in winter but in summer we just toil along, choked with dust and not a drop of water by the road - the poor sheep lying down in agony and panting for their lives. Some we have to leave by the roadside and the butchers collect them up in their carts when they're coming home. Others will run into the wheat fields causing us and our dogs no end of trouble. Those racer-bred southdowns will leap over our heads like deer and sometimes hit us on the face and lay us sprawling on our backs if one bolts the others are sure to follow, jumping one after the other like boys playing leapfrog. Then the farmers will beat us for not keeping the sheep off the corn - blast they've run off again while I bin talking to you ..."

23

The church of St Andrew the Great on the corner of Petty Cury was, he noted, a picturesque building with an odd tower which seemed more modern than the rest & windows which were glazed with fragments of painted glass removed from other buildings and refixed anyhow. It certainly had character.

Pickwick was about to pass it by when he was accosted by the Vicar, George Langshaw. "This parish, sir, is in turmoil - there has been such a great increase in building here in central Cambridge and our old church - built in the 1600s can only seat 580 people. We are planning to pull the whole thing down and start again and have drawn up specifications which we are about to put out to tender - might I show you the architect's sketch - a fine church you will agree"





Pickwick did not, but the Vicar was continuing : "a donation, however small, would be welcome ... Of course we will ensure that our greatest treasure is preserved - the new monument to Captain James Cook - one of our country's greatest explorers killed, as you will recall, by the natives of Owybee on St Valentine's Day, 1779. Each time I look at it I grieve for his wife, Elizabeth, for each time Cook started his circumnavigations of the globe he left her pregnant and in both cases the child was dead before he returned. Three sons survived infancy, James, Nathaniel and Hugh. The two eldest became sailors and both were drowned.

"Elizabeth was determined her youngest, Hugh, should stay away from the sea and got him admitted to Christ's college - just over the road - but then he was struck down with scarlet fever and died just before Christmas 1793. He's buried here, together with his brother James drowned the next year. But Mrs Cook lived on until she was 93 - dying just three years ago, having been a widow 56 years and buried all her children. She arranged for this monument to be placed here.

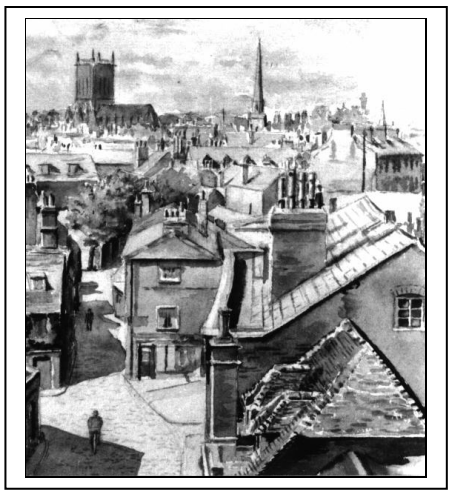
"Of course Cambridge has its own Naval hero - Captain Thomas Coe, who lives in Maid's Causeway in a very fine house with fine furniture, including a four-poster bed made with wood from New South Wales where he has lands granted to him by the Governor after his bravery towards a shipwrecked crew off New Zealand. He had a very distinguished career, serving in both the West and East Indies and superintending the naval operations against the Burmese in the campaign of 1825 before retiring the following year back here to his native town, highly respected.

"But of course respect and wealth cannot ensure happiness. Just around the corner live two of the richest ladies in the parish, daughters of an eminent solicitor who endowed them with a great fortune and lands at Fen Ditton but who are now the laughing stock of the parish. I blame the tigers - but I don't suppose you are interested in such things sir ... "

Pickwick considered that a small donation to the rebuilding of the church might be worthwhile after all to learn more

Pickwick followed his clerical guide around the back of St Andrew the Great and into a maze of houses beyond, squalid, ramshackled affairs bursting with humanity many of whom had found shelter here when their previous wretched dwellings were demolished to make way for new college accommodation needed to meet the growth in student numbers. But the town's population was growing too, adding to the overcrowding.

Then they emerged onto St Andrew's Hill with the view south to the open grassy, tree-lined expanse which led finally to Downing college - what a contrast to the squalor he had left just a few steps behind. To his right was a vista over the trees and shrubs of the Botanic Garden, the spires of King's college chapel visible beyond.



The Hill itself was home to the cattle market and much improved now that the hog-pens which had until earlier that year been allowed to remain permanently in place were now removed after trading. Here in a substantial house lived two sisters Sophia and Mary Ann Bones, wealthy middle-aged, somewhat stout women who had been once rather good looking but were now dishevelled, their clothes dirty and themselves the object of ridicule.

"They are generous enough and subscribed 10/- for the fund to give the poor a dinner to commemorate Queen Victoria's coronation a few weeks ago, I have known them give 1/- to a poor dumb man with a dancing bear and contribute to help the coal porters who cannot work during the winter months when the River Cam freezes over. They are generous to their daily servant, Susan Mills - though she gossips about them horridly, spreading all sorts of stories

"They buy food all right and know the price of everything - butter 1/4 a lb, Cottenham cheese 7d, tea 2/8 and coffee 3/- a lb - but their servant says they think it is poisoned and never eat it - they wrap it up in paper parcels, write the date on it and leave it around the house.

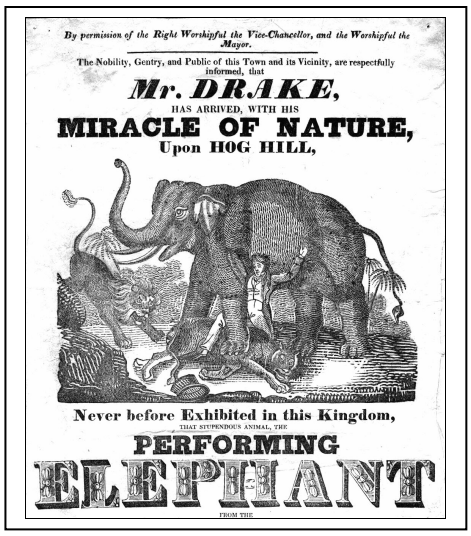
"When last I saw them they spoke of leaving Cambridge. Sophia told me 'Don't you know our house is haunted? Its all done by the government: they have got spies disguised like sweeps who go about the flues and take down in shorthand our lowest whispers - but we fool them - we write messages down on slates and pass them to each other'. I fear they will eventually be declared lunatics and taken to an Asylum

"Their house is falling down - sad for it overlooks the Botanic Garden and now our own parish workhouse is up for sale there will be less unfortunates congregating at the back of the Lion Yard. Of course the pig market is held outside their windows and they do get upset by the lions when the menageries visit Hog Hill - and that business over the bodysnatchers did not improve the situation"

With that the Minister took his leave and left Pickwick seeking further details of the extraordinary activities described

"It is criminal, what goes on on this Hill, and it should not be allowed. My father was a solicitor, he would have put a stop to it"

Pickwick searched around for any sign of the voice that seemed to come from thin air. Then he spotted a shadowy shape at an upper window of the house on 5 St Andrew's Hill, it could only be Mary Ann Bones.



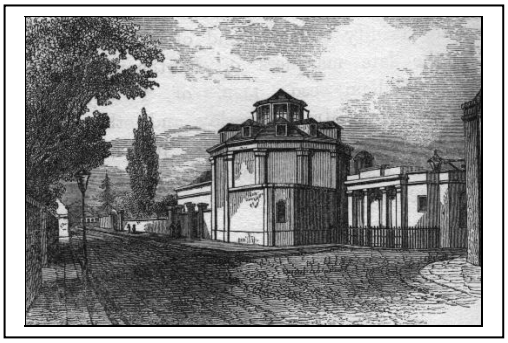
"The poor animals, pent up here, roaring all night - we get them all - ten-foot high elephants, onagra - like the zebra but larger, aurochos with those two large horns growing from their forehead, polar sea-monsters, anaconda, panthers. You should hear the din made by the spotted laughing hyaena, how can anybody sleep through that. No wonder we get irritable.

"My sister and I are particularly upset by the way species are interbred - to mate lions and tigers together is unnatural - well might Atkins claim the cubs "the first of their species" - and how could the late King, God bless his soul, endorse such profanity

"We are going to petition the Council to move the Menageries away from the centre. People say it would not attract the crowds but in June this year Bridge's circus set up a handsome commodious building on Midsummer green with a ring fourteen yards in diameter and our servant Susan said there was not a seat from which whole performance could not be perfectly seen.

"People are such beasts - and the more educated they become the worse they get. You would not believe what goes on in that University Anatomy School just across the Hill. I know that Mr Weems should have been hanged for the murder of his wife in 1819 but then to take the body away in a cart and attach it to those galvanic batteries and subject it to electrical discharges was awful. They say they got the body twitching its face and flexing his arm - it is not natural. And then to open it up to public view the next day - hundreds of people flocked to see the body and constables had to be called in to control the numbers.

"I had hoped we had become more civilised but now there's so much body-snatching to supply the corpses needed for the anatomy work - why the body of landlord of the Boars Head on Market Hill was robbed from its grave in Cherry Hinton in 1827 and never found

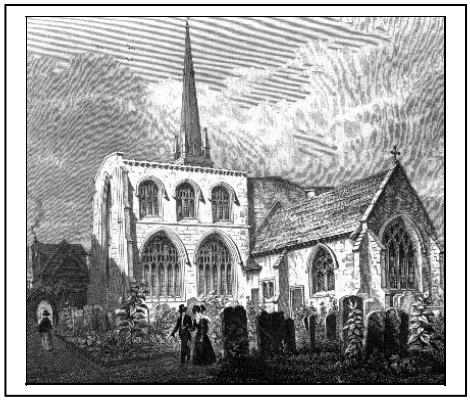


"But the worse was just five years ago - December 1833 - when a body from Holy Trinity parish was taken for dissection - some said without permission. A mob of 300 people flocked to St Andrew's Hill and threw stones at the Anatomy school. They broke in and ransacked the building.
The Mayor was forced to read the Riot Act and a fierce battle raged for two hours right outside our house - and continued at the Town Gaol when prisoners were taken there. The body was later removed and given a Christian burial, thank God

"And people say that we're the mad ones"__

Pickwick retraced his steps to the corner of Petty Cury and continued northward passing the church which had been described as "Simeons" but now transpired to have the more formal name of Holy Trinity

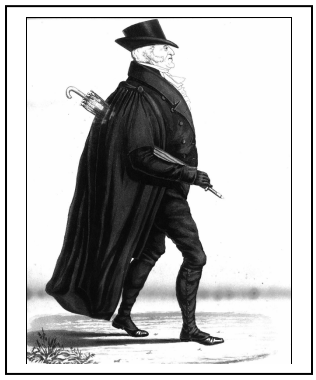
But no church should have to undergo the indignities that this one was suffering as a somewhat elderly gentleman half hidden behind a tombstone made plain



"Our parishioners are always making remonstrances to the Churchwardens upon the nuisances and desecrations committed in the churchyard - women hang their washing out here, sheets flapping over the gravestones. As for horses - people ride them through part of the graveyard, damaging the footpath, Veterinary Surgeons conduct examinations right outside the church and the Minister has had frequently to suspend funeral services since his words are drowned by the noise of the animals

"Houses which open on to the back of the churchyard claim a right of way through to the road - have done since 1557. But people take liberties - in 1738 Richard Reynolds built a shed to garage his chaise - that cannot be right, not to stable a vehicle on church land. So we tried to stop up the cartway and just leave a footpath on the south side - who knows how many people will be tramping their boots through our churchyard just to get from one shop to another in the years to come - you mark my words or my name's not Spenser - we shall have to keep on fighting.

"Mind you our churchwardens are used to fighting - you should have heard the fuss they made when the Bishop first appointed Reverend Charles Simeon to be our Vicar - that was in 1782. You see they wanted to have the old curate, Mr Hammond since he was a good lecturer - an ancient position separate from the incumbency which we've had at least since 1610. Well by tradition the lecturer has the use of the pulpit every Sunday afternoon meaning Simeon could only preach in the morning - but all the parishioners used to stay away, and to lock the doors of their pews, so that anybody who did come had to stand in the aisles.



"Then Simeon tried a Sunday evening lecture - and got a good crowd, but the wardens locked the church doors and carried off the keys leaving everybody standing out in the street. So the Vicar hired a room and carried on his preaching there. But he was a great evangelist and was minister here 54 years so gradually people came round to him. In fact the church was so packed that he first built a gallery to hold them and then pulled down the old chancel and replaced it with this new extension built of brick and plaster which he designed himself. Do you know we put a memorial up to him when he died two years ago in 1836 even though his funeral was held in Kings college chapel - I'd show you except that I need to keep watch for those d....d horses|"

27

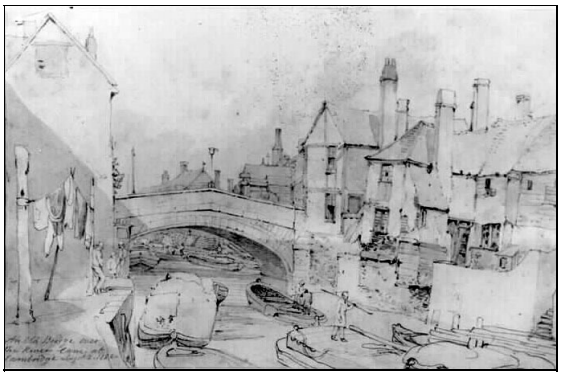
Having finally reached the Hoop Hotel and made arrangements for his luggage to be delivered to his present accommodation in the Castle Inn - the initial reluctance of the baggage clerk quickly giving way once he recognised the gentleman who tipped so well -

Pickwick decided to continue his stroll towards that other castle on the northern extremity of town.

He noticed the Round Church - but that could wait for he had already explored enough ecclesiastical buildings for one morning, he ignored St Clement's with its steeple and strode on, casting glances right and left into various lanes and yards opening off either side of Bridge Street, though these could surely yield a story or two for his journal.

Ahead was a bridge, a fine new cast-iron affair, carrying the bustle of traffic across the somewhat mouldy and turgid looking stream of the River Cam. He leaned on the railings on the left-hand side casting his eyes towards where yet more new buildings could be glimpsed and then crossed, dodging the traffic to the other side to look down on what was obviously the one of the busiest areas of town where wooden barges were unloading commodities of all sorts. As he stood and contemplated his ears caught snatches of a conversation between two elderly residents.

"This 'ere bridge is wearing well really - bin up 15 years already but do you remember the fuss they always had with the old stone bridge - they only built that in 1754 and it was ruinous by 1800 - they was always having to close it for repairs. That was called the "Great Bridge" but do you remember how narrow it was - it could never take the traffic even of those days. Mind you this new one is about twice as wide and they did get it done on time - started in June 1823 and had it opened by the December - and at the proper cost. Do you remember the temporary wooden bridge they put up - much better than having to traipse round to Silver street or have to take a boat across the river every time.



"Of course I've heard tell how hundreds of years ago there used to be a wooden bridge here and when that got too rickety the Sheriff used to run a ferry across - and charge people money to cross the river - and he used to send his men out at night to pull down the work the bridge-builders had done during the day - so it took longer to build and he got more money from his ferry".

"But I do sometimes wish they'd bring back the ducking stool what used to stand just there on Quayside - where they used to duck the old women who nagged their husbands. That got swept away in one of the floods - which made a lot of wives happier and their menfolk less so. But then there came a proper scold - everybody was sure she'd be convicted so they replaced the ducking stool - only she got let off"

Suddenly their reminiscences were interrupted by an even louder shout from somewhere amongst the crush of barges beneath them, a flurry of activity and a loud splash.

28

"Let that be a lesson to you - steal from me again and I'll horsewhip you". Pickwick focused on a very wet and bedraggled youth hauling himself from the River Cam on to the crowded mass of commerce that was Quayside.

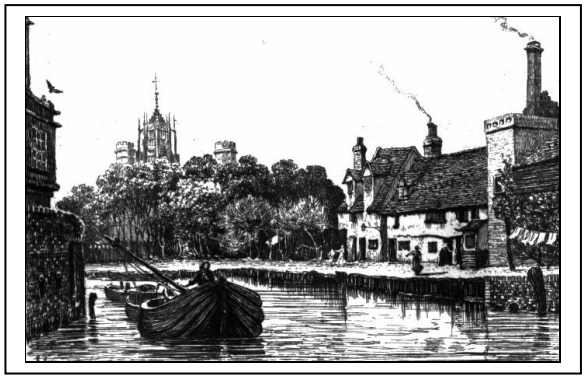
He followed the rush to the waterside and sought an explanation from a weather-beaten bargeman who was joining in the laughter, spluttering on his pipe.

"Ut serves him right - us hard-working traders can do without the likes of him.

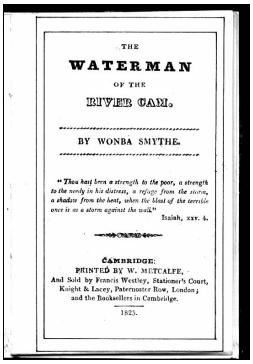
"That chap stalking off, he's Palmer a wine merchant. He ordered a ton of coals to be sent to his house on Market Hill so the cart went out next morning between 6 & 7 with the coals but one of Palmer's men thought it not proper measure & refused to take them in until he had informed
his master; when the coals were weighed it was found their was a deficiency of above 3 cwt. Palmer went to the Magistrates but they could not interfere as the Act of Parliament relating to weight of coals only extends for 25 miles around London - so he come down here and sorted it out for himself.

"Mind you there's a lot of fiddling goes on with coal - take the undergraduates - they never get full measure 'cos the college servants always take a lump or two for themselves, they see it as one of the perks of the job.

"There's various coal merchants around this area - John Eaden, William Collin, Joseph Lawrence - as well as Lyon, Shaw and Sparrow, and the Nutters - though some say they're in a bad way



"Their coalyards stretch along the river on the other side of the bridge, beyond Fisher's Lane and will hold over 1100 tons of coal as well as a maltings and granaries for corn - you see we bring the coal down to Cambridge and go back loaded with corn - tell you about that later. Anyway they got a good house beside the bridge - commercial room, kitchen, scullery - and even a water-closet upstairs!. They use part as their counting house - I saw their safe once, made of iron with a massive strong lock. Well you can imagine the money they handle what with the Pickerel inn as well. That's much patronised by the farmers from the fen district - they seem to like it cos they go often enough and stay long enough - and as for the beer, well they reckon sales must be immense.



THE
WATERMAN
OF THE
RIVER CAM.

BY WONBA SMYTHE.

"Thou hast been a strength to the poor, a strength to the needy in his distress, a refuge from the storm, a shadow from the heat, when the blast of the terrible ones is as a storm against the wall." Isaiah, xxv. 4.

CAMBRIDGE:
PRINTED BY W. METCALFE,
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1823.

Well its convenient for us watermen too and we have a good reputation for our beer. Some of the Cambridge gentry have a go at us for profaning the Sabbath with our drinking and swearing. Hang on - see that chap coming along Bridge street, the old sailor with the wooden leg - well he's Womba Smyth & he hawks religious tracts and if he catches me I'll never get away. Tell you what, you come aboard, if you don't mind the dust, and join us while we make our way down to the Mill

29

Pickwick found himself afloat near Magdalene bridge in the cramped cabin that gave shelter for the men who worked the barges on their regular journey from Kings Lynn to Cambridge, carrying one of the most important of commodities, coal from Newcastle. Here bargemaster Will Spread, told him something of the trials and tribulations of his job.

"Once we're got a full load - we have either five or six barges in the chain, we have to wait till the tides right - and when there's a good breeze from the Wash we can hoist the sail and have easy passage past Wiggenhall till Denver sluice. Mind you you have to watch yer step there -

there was an accident just six month ago when one barge got sunk and they're still arguing over it.

"The run down past Southery's good and straight - and you can imagine that steering a line of barges like this is a skilled job. We connect the stern of one boat to the stem of the next by stout chains and have a pole which projects over the bow into the barge in front. Then one chap standing at the back of the first barge can steer the lot - except when we get to the sharp bends in the river when we have to run up and down with long poles to stop the lighters grounding against the bank.

"Anyway we try and get to a pub to stop for the night - there's several down the river, I usually aim for the Ship at Brandon Creek - but there's some rum 'ole coots in that part of the world, and you should hear some of the tales they tell. Seems that in the olden days, when the river was tidal all the way up to Cambridge, before Denver sluice were built, well they hung some people. They drove some piles in the river and put a cross beam between them. Then they stood these here people on one of the barges with a noose round their necks and tied to the gallows. 'Cos as the river level dropped, so the barges went down - but the men didn't. That took a couple of hours until they was swinging free - made for good sales at the pub I can tell you. I have heard it said that they still haunt the spot but by the time I'm had a pint or two (and here he winked) I never take no notice.

"We have to stop at Littleport and that is a place to avoid. I'm sure even London gentlemen like you will have heard about them riots they had in 1816. Well I know life's hard in them fens and no matter how long they work they can't get enough to keep themselves alive, but you can't start taking the law into your own hands - why I'm heard stories of people attacking our barges when we go back - cos we carry corn then. But in Littleport they went round the village asking farmers for a bit more wages and the millers to keep the prices down (he winked again) - but it were the vicar pulled his gun out didn't help - they weren't gonna be shot by no parson. But then setting off to Ely with that punt gun mounted on a farm cart ... they was wrong there. Mind you I don't reckon magistrates should have sent in the soldiers against them, nor hung so many - though at least that were a civilised hanging, not like at Brandon Creek"

30

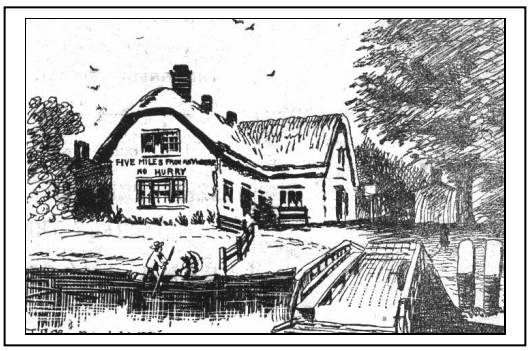
Seated in the cabin of a coal barge near Quayside Pickwick learned something of an environment he never knew existed.

"Mind you out in the fen they don't burn coal in their houses - they always burn the peat. But the windpumps that used to drain the fens can't do the job - well the more they dry the fen out, the more the levels drop and the deeper the ditches have to be cut. Them windmills can't only lift a few feet of water so

they tried putting another mill beside the first - double-lift they call it - you should see the hundreds of them out in the fen. So nowadays they're spending lots of money on new steam pumping engines. There's a big one opened at Stretham about seven years back - and of course they need coal.

"That fair puzzles me how such a massive machine can be invented - that's one of the wonders of this modern age. Of course they need our help to put them up as they're always out in the middle of nowhere and there's no roads so all the heavy ironwork has to come down by barges.

"Now there's talk about these new railways and I reckon that'll be good for our trade too. Most people say they'll never be able to lay their lines over the fens because the soil's so boggy that won't take the weight of the track but what I say is that if they want to try then they can hire my barges to carry their tackle. Even if they do ever open up this railway they'll always be a need for our barges. They're so shallow we can get almost anywhere - down to Soham or Burwell, along the Lark to Mildenhall - and there'll always be work - why they opened a new cut out Isleham way just a few years ago



"Sometimes we trade down the lodes at Upware - and that is an isolated place, five miles from anywhere. People say they were dug by the Romans hundreds of years ago before Ely Cathedral was built - and that they used stone out of the pits at Reach, like we still carry. And we do a lot of trade down to the Commercial End at Swaffham Bulbeck.

"Costs have gone up recently because of all the tolls we have to pay but we're still cheap as we only carry a small crew, just two men and our horse-knocker who sleeps in the hollip - that's the hutch at the front of the third barge. It's his job to look after the horse which walks along the top of the river bank and pulls the string of barges with a long stretch of rope. A barge horse has to be a good jumper for when we get to the fences between areas of bank he has to wait till the rope gets slack, and then jump over the fences and carry on.

"There are places where we have to cross the horse from one bank to the other and a good horse will jump on the butt boat - that's what we call the last lighter - and jump off again on the other side. Otherwise you have to take him across on a ferry. There's one at Little Thetford where the Old West joins the Cam and another at Upware. But life really gets much harder when you get near Cambridge".

31

By now Will Spread, skipper of a line of barges carrying coals to Cambridge, was warming to his theme - "Cambridge! Cambridge depends on us bargemen - always has done. Why we bring in all the things they need - coal, timber, food - especially wine. Yet when we get near Cambridge we get stuck time after time - there just ain't enough water in the rivers to float our boats - even though we can get out to the isolated villages in the fen.

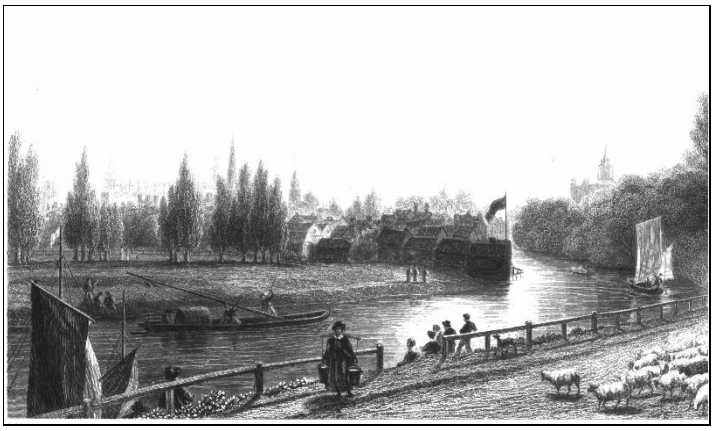
"They've got this group of 'Conservators' supposed to collect tolls to keep the river open - well they do half the job - the take the money all right - but the council appoint themselves and they just take it as an excuse for a river trip now and again - you should see them with their rosy faces playing cards with their friends as they sail at public cost to see if the Cam has any water in it - they give us a wave as they drift past on their very comfortable barge and we're struggling hard to earn our lining on this old thing.

"And now they've had this banker to come up with ideas for improving the navigation - wouldn't be so bad if he worked on the river banks - but he's a money-banker - chap named Charles Humfrey - mayor of Cambridge now, got a big house ..." "By the garden of Eden" Pickwick chipped in, "rents out his stables to the police"

"That's the boy - how did you know that - but anyway he surveys the depth of the rivers, talks about rebuilding the sluice at Baitsbite - well that is worn out - but the one at Chesterton that's all right - only the sill is too high. But this Humfrey chap reckons to build another one at Clayhithe - and there's that new sluice on Jesus Green in place of the old one at the Fort St George. You know there used to be a landlord there reckoned he could play billiards and how he was so popular - well he ended up bankrupt - let me see his name were ..."

"John Brown - had an argy bargy with some University chap". "Blast you do know everything! Has Womba gone yet"

Pickwick peered through the cabin window as the one-legged tract peddler crossed the bridge and headed up towards the gaol on Castle Hill. Once he was out of sight his companion decided it was now safe to continue his voyage along the most difficult part of his route, the last stretch from Magdalene Bridge to Silver Street.



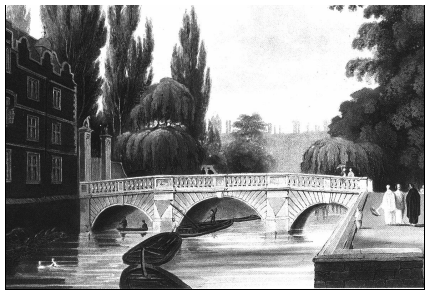
His horse-knocker who had been standing with his charge on the rough piece of common ground that was Jesus Green forced the animal into the water and, perched on its back waded through the mass of boats till in position at the front of Spread's line of barges. Ropes were lashed from horse to lead boat whilst Will and his mate used large poles to push the barges towards the middle of a stream that seemed to be running fast against them. Shouts urged the horse to take the strain, the barges creaked and slowly moved off into what was for Pickwick unknown territory.

32

The warmth of an August day was suddenly blotted out by the shadow of the great iron bridge as Pickwick's barge drifted below, to emerge once more into daylight. Ahead an elegant enclosed stone bridge awaited them.

"Blooming college bridges" sighed bargee Will Spread "if this stretch of water ain't bad enough already these colleges will keep adding more obstructions. Mind you I do like this next one - the old bridge of St John's college and I never go past it without having a word with old father Cam"

Pickwick glanced around him, there was nobody to be seen.



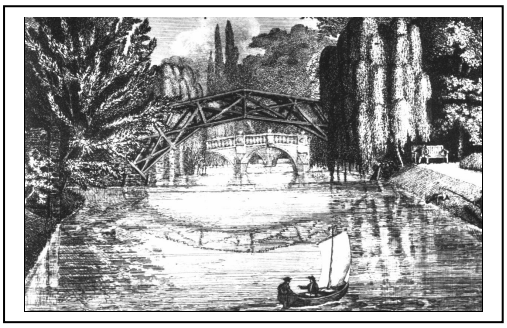
"There he is sitting with his books watching the world drift by - there on the side of the bridge, carved in stone", but by now they were passed.

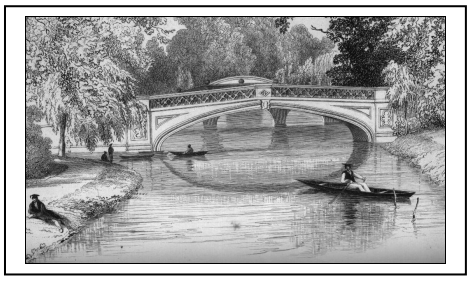
"This is the best time of the year to make this part of the trip, when the grads aren't here - not that I mind them, though they do give us a bit of lip - and I sometimes give them a black eye. Its not that end that bothers me but all these colleges empty their privies straight into the river. You get a good hot summer and not much flow on the river and that can fair pong along here. Mind you by the time that's flowed down towards Chesterton way that can be most unpleasant, especially when you're crossing it on a ferry - or rowing through it - perhaps that's why they go so fast!"

Pickwick averted his gaze from the river and looked at the vistas around him, ducking involuntarily as they passed under Trinity college bridge.

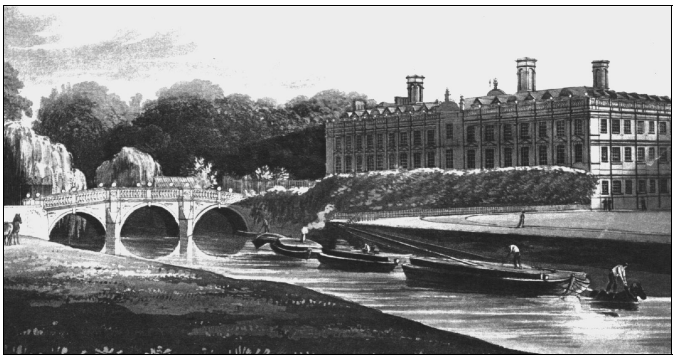
"We're lucky too that the watermills at Silver street aren't working at full power, when they do they let such a rush of water come down against us that the poor old horse has really got to strain just to keep us going forward and we have to lean on our poles and push as hard as we can. That can take us half a day or more sometimes to get from Magdalene bridge to Silver Street. That there Humfrey chap he had some idea of putting posts in the river with rings and pulleys on so that we could winch our barges along - but that'll never come about

"Instead of that they spend money on bridges - they've gone iron-bridge mad - just take this next one coming up - Gerards Hostel bridge they call it. That used to be an old wooden thing - 'Mathematical Bridge' we called it - well you'll see another one just like it when we get to Queens' college. We used to puzzle out how that held together, only that kept breaking down so the Council decided to put in that iron bridge instead. That look nice - Butterleys built it just the other year - only their workmen went on strike half-way through and that weren't finished when the Council said - and so they're suing the company for the delay. That weren't his fault, but that's this Council all over - they're always at law over something or other ..."





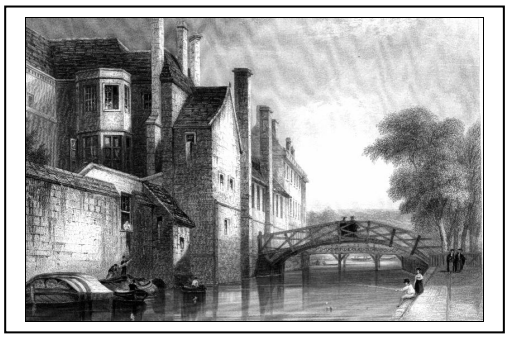
From his position on the second of a string of four barges loaded with coal Pickwick could only admire the skill of the horse-knocker as, perched on the animal's back, he urged the beast through the rushing water of the Cam, feeling its hooves slip occasionally on the hard river bed, despite the surface laid there specifically for that purpose. He was steering towards the centre arch of the fragile-looking stone bridge of Clare college, towing the barges behind him.



At the same time bargee Will Spread leaned hard on his long pole to bring the lead boat into line whilst his mate performed a similar exercise on the last barge endeavouring to keep the convoy in a straight line through a gap which seemed only slightly wider than the boats themselves.

Then they were through and he caught his first sight of the west end of magnificent chapel of King's College, resplendent in the August sunshine, the brilliant white of the Gibbs building alongside and - inevitably it seemed - yet more new buildings in the Gothic style which everybody seemed to favour those days.

"Good work Mr Spread" he called forward. "Yes that is a bit of a devil", came the reply, "mind you its a lot easier now than that were twenty years ago 'cos King's college used to have their old bridge almost alongside Clare and that had only two arches - that were a right job getting under both. But they've put this new one up now - the one ahead - and that has only one arch so there's plenty of room. Mind you how something so simple could cost over £3,700 I dunno and some people were opposed to it - said that would ruin the landscaping or something - well you can see where the old one stood, and the road running across the middle of the meadow on a raised causeway. That was some old clergyman suggested moving it - chap called Simeon". "What the vicar of Holy Trinity church" asked Pickwick. "Blast me you do know everything - are you sure you're just visiting!"



By now they were under the new King's college bridge and soon the ancient buildings of Queens' college rose sheer from the river, a line of barges moored alongside as provisions were transferred to supplement college kitchens and cellars.

There ahead was the old wooden bridge Spread had mentioned earlier - that then was what Gerard's Hostel bridge had looked like, no wonder it was always falling down. "They say it was designed by some undergraduate who'd been to China and was put together with no nails - only the students got drunk one time - well they're drunk most of the time - and decided to pull it apart to see how it all held together. But they couldn't put it back again and had to put them bolts in to keep it up".

Pickwick had a good opportunity to inspect the construction for the line of barges had ground to halt, the horse now motionless with waves lapping up its neck. Even the lighters were wallowing, despite their load and for the first time Pickwick felt uneasy.

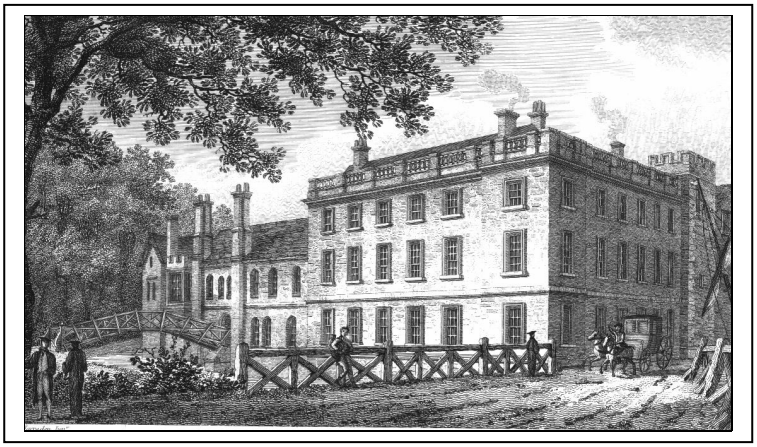
From his coal barge Pickwick looked ahead under the wooden framework of Queens' college bridge to yet another wooden structure so narrow that it seemed only one vehicle could pass across it at a time. Yet this marked one of the most important thoroughfares into Cambridge as the queues of carts along Silver Street testified.

It was not only the road that was congested however as the horse-knocker called back - Mill Pool was packed with other barges one of which had got itself jammed across the river and they would have to wait.

"This coal we carry is for Beales - the firm was built up by the old man Patrick about fifty years ago - he knew who you had to know in them days and was in with the Corporation so he paid what they call a "fine" of about £500 for a 999 year lease and now owns all the right bank of the Cam from Silver street bridge to Newnham mill - wharves and warehouses and all - and pays just 20 shillings a year rent for it. When he died it passed to his son Samuel Pickering Beales and he made enough money to build that large house" - he pointed to the right - "the Hermitage they call it, one of the best properties in town, were it not spoiled by being so near the river - but I suppose he needs to live near his work.

“Mind you though his dad were in with the Council Samuel fought them - well he had to really if his trade was to survive. You see the Corporation used to charge a toll of 2d for every loaded waggon that came over the bridge, if it unloaded there was another charge and if it took a fresh load 2d more. Of course you could avoid paying if you sneaked in early and left late - but the toll keeper could see who'd paid since he put a chalk mark on the cart - a different colour every day"

"But", said Pickwick, "surely it is normal for councils to charge a toll to fund the repair of the bridge - and by the look of this one it certainly needs it"



“Ah yes, but you see the Corporation were so corrupt that back in 1788 the Government put in another body - the Cambridge Improvement Commissioners to repair roads and things - and they get the money through levying taxes. So what do the Council spend the toll money on then - on the prison, on the poor - no - they spend it on riot and gluttony, on feasts monthly, annual and occasional on every pretext - some say on midnight orgies - and I wouldn't put that past them.

“So in 1824 Beales refused to pay and was taken to court - they dug out all the old documents, back to Domesday, the charters and statutes and everything. The hearing lasted for a day and a half by which time the Lord Chief Justice was so exhausted by it all he could hardly sum up the case. But the jury had no doubts, the council had no rights to the tolls. Mind you they wouldn't accept it so they had another case - which the Corporation won - and then a decider, which they lost - and with it about half their income. And I shall lose my income too if we don't soon get unloaded and back to Lynn”

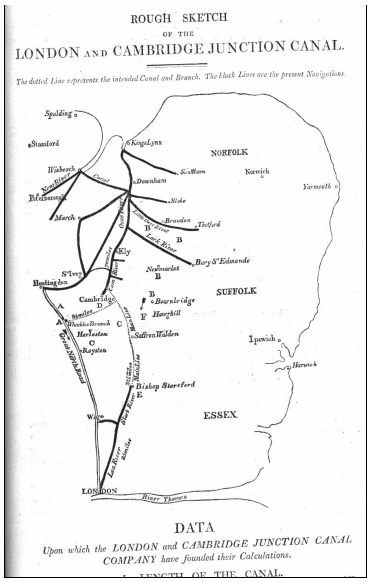
Pickwick's barge suddenly jerked and moved forward under Silver Street bridge and into the Mill Pool, taking a broad sweep right, its progress hindered by the rush of water that was coming from a giant watermill.

Shortly afterwards the horse-knacker released the tow-rope, Will Spread and his companion leaned on their poles, and the line of barges were moored alongside the wharf and warehouses just beyond Beales' house

Now it was all activity as porters set work unloading the coal, the larger lumps being carried out by hand whilst the smaller coal was shovelled into wheelbarrows propelled along a gangplank to the quay and then tipped into the coalyard, dust everywhere. Once empty the barges would be swept out and refilled this time with sacks of grain to be conveyed back to Kings Lynn and the open sea.

The produce of the fertile fields south of Cambridge was brought to town by cart but surely the river continued beyond Cambridge, why not use boats instead. Pickwick raised the question with his new friend.

"Now you have it sir - river navigation must be the way forward, we could cut the costs down to 4d a ton a mile - about one quarter of the road price. Why in 1810 there was an act of parliament passed for a new canal to be made from Clayhithe sluice down to Bishop Stortford that would link the ports of Kings Lynn and London. There would have been a new basin cut on Jesus Green where goods could be transferred from barges to canal boats and that would act as a reservoir letting down flushes of water in the dry seasons to give us better navigation over the shallow bits of the Cam.



“But everybody was against it - the Lynn people since they thought boats would come up direct from London and not go around the coast to their port, the Cambridge council because they thought it would bring many more watermen cluttering up their rivers. They tried again in 1814 for a canal to Saffron Walden but that came to nothing and now there these plans for a railway, but if people wouldn't put the money up twenty year ago for a canal they certainly won't now for something as expensive as a railway

“But if you're talking about the Cam well I don't know what’s happening there except that there been a court case just a couple of weeks ago - you go across and see Mr Hawes. He lets out boats just the other side of the King's Mill".

Suddenly Spread, so big and fearless in appearance, took fright and dived, into his cabin. Pickwick looked round to see if Womba Smyth was once more on his religious round, but all he could see was a homely plump woman, her ruddy brow as black as the coal dust around him.

36

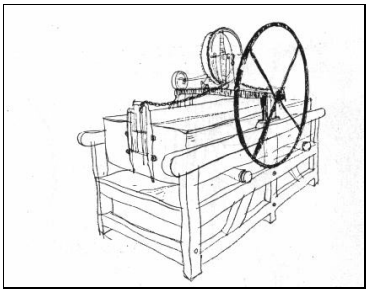
As the woman approached the coal barge and perceived the fine figure - for his age - of Samuel Pickwick so her manner became less hostile, her frown faded and a smile spread across her face. Instead of a thunderous boom the voice that greeted him was soft and enchanting.

"Is Mister Spread at home, this is his barge?" Of the latter there was no denial for his name was writ large on the side in accordance with regulations. It was equally obvious that Mr Spread did not wish to be at home to his visitor.

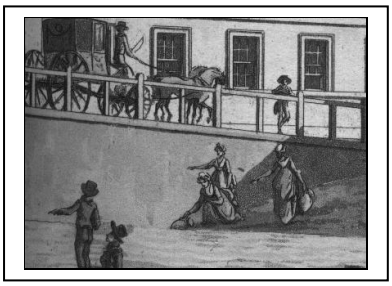
Pickwick racked his brains for a reply and launched into a modified account of the incident at the Great Bridge and how the bargee had stayed behind to calm matters down. But if that were so how had the line of barges made its way to Mill Pool - it was obvious the woman was not fooled. It was equally obvious however that she had taken to Mr Pickwick.

"Poor man", she cooed, "just look at the state of you, all covered coal dust, why you come with me and let me put you straight, you cannot be seen in Cambridge like that"

So saying she took his arm and with no little force propelled him up and across Silver Street bridge, right down Laundress Lane and into one of a number of cottages on Granta Place deep in the shade of the watermill. As she did so she introduced herself as Mrs Alice Bond, a widow-woman, and explained her business with Will Spread. "I've been doing his laundry for him free now for some months - you see he's been promising to bring me a box mangle down from Kings Lynn - Mrs Shuker's got one and it presses the sheets a treat - and now that the grads will soon be back there'll be work a plenty".



Pickwick tried to pay attention as his shirt was stripped from him and plunged into a tub of hot soapy water which had obviously washed a great many other shirts that day already. "I know they take up a lot of space - and they're so heavy it can go right through the floorboards. But it has to be heavy to do the job - you see it has a wooden box which you fill with stones and then you have a big handle that works a chain and moves it backwards and forwards ..."

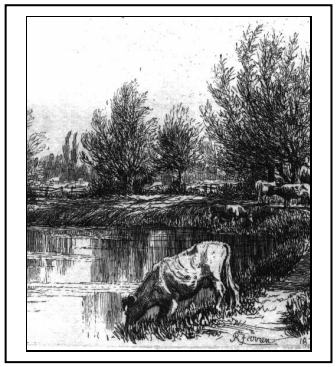


Washing was obviously an important part of Cambridge life. Mrs Bond and her four grown-up children did the laundry for two colleges. The eldest son hired a handcart for ld an hour and collected the sheets from the college bedders. Mrs Bond and some hired women scrubbed then in the kitchen, dashing down to the Mill Pool to fetch water as required - hopefully after the mud had settled again after the horses had churned it up. But a box mangle would be a real benefit - she could then do mangling for other laundresses ~ if only Spread would keep his word and bring it for her. So saying she took Pickwick's shirt and headed outside

37

The laundrywoman, Mrs Bond, returned moments later having securely pegged Pickwick's shirt to one of the washing lines which festooned the island of land called Laundress Green and continued across Coe Fen spreading well up towards the back of Peterhouse.

"Council are on to a good thing there", she explained - "they charge us an annual fee to put up our own posts and hang out the washing - if we forget to pay the pindar will pull the pole down. But the grounds so muddy we sometimes slip over when we're bringing the washing back and have to do the whole lot again. Then they let the horses and cattle wander all over the common - and you just get one of them coal horses too near your clean laundry and that don't bare telling of.



"Now five year ago the Commissioners said what we'd always told them - that the mud is so bad it comes up to the horses heels and if the ground were not drained that would be fatal to the health of the town. Council are still thinking about it ..." It seemed to Pickwick he had heard something of the sort before

It was not long before the conversation came round to another topic Pickwick had heard before - the difficulties of coping as a poor widow woman with a family to support. Perhaps, Pickwick mused, this was the reason Will Spread had hidden.

"But", she said, "this is a most difficult time to have pretty young daughters. Girls are so headstrong these days - why was there not that case in the newspaper just the other week - so somebody told me, I don't read myself - don't have time I mean - how that young lady and her beau had arrived at the White Horse in Ealing in a great rush to change horses but before this could be accomplished further galloping wheels sent her scurrying into the Oxford Arms public house and run upstairs. Once it became apparent that the arrival was merely that of the Oxford coach she and her companion became more composed and returned once more to the street. Suddenly however the gentleman was knocked to the ground without warning, the girl bundled into a carriage and driven off by her parents. She was just 19, an heiress with £45,000 on her coming of age and had eloped with an officer in the army from Cheltenham and was en route to Gretna Green.

"And if you say anything you never knew what they will do - take that case at Newport where a woman by name of Phillips wished to attend a fashionable bazaar given for the benefit of new church but her husband objected - she said if she could not go she would chop off her finger - her husband laughed but she did it, and then a second finger and then 'heres to go at the hand' and she half chopped it off with a hatchet - and she said she would do it again rather than suffer restraint on her reasonable inclinations"

"But it is even worse here in Cambridge than anywhere else. You never knew when your daughter went out in an evening if she would come back. There were plenty of rich young university gentlemen in the town many of them anxious for female company, but they were not the problem. It was the Proctors and their Spinning House ..."

She was about to continue when a clap of thunder heralded the start of heavy rain and the entire household rushed outside to fetch in the almost dry washing.

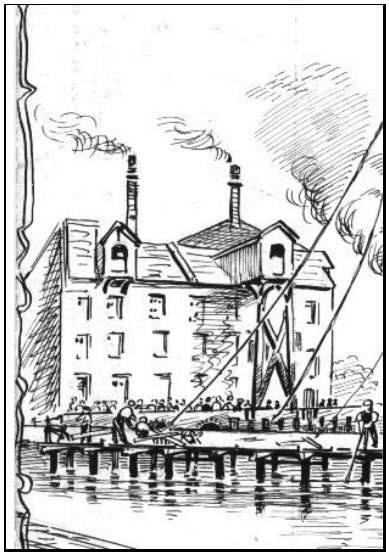
38

Quite how Pickwick disentangled himself from the widowed washerwoman and her attractive daughters is not recorded in the small script of his notebook - some things are better confined to memory to be amplified as required when recounting adventures over future dinners. He did however note her advice on the procurement of the necessities of life - tea and mineral water.

For the former he should ensure he purchased only the very superior, fine flavoured and strong Indian variety produced by the London Genuine Tea Company - obtainable from its Cambridge agent, Mr T. Newby - a seedsman in Bridge Street, though Mrs Bond did wonder whether John Abbott Unwin would also stock it in his new grocery and tea warehouse in Trinity Street for he was promising superior items at the cheapest rates and tea was expensive enough. But London tea came in lead packages and would certainly not be contaminated with all the odd sorts of mixtures that might adulterate other brews.

Her older daughter however would insist on cold drinks. For her it had to be Schweppes lemonade and even here there were problems - other companies were selling their drinks in the Schweppes bottles but the genuine article had a red label over the cork with their name on either side. He could buy it from Matthews & Gent in Trinity Street or Pains the chemist in Rose Crescent.

By the time he emerged resplendent in a shirt well washed and ironed by the prettiest daughter Pickwick was content with the world and armed with an introduction to the owner of one of the oldest and most important of the buildings in Cambridge, which had dominated the area for centuries before the arrival of the first of the colleges and which cast its shadow over the small houses in Granta Place.



He was fortunate in finding James Nutter supervising the repairs that always seemed to be needed in such ancient establishments and fussing around the new warehouse he had just leased in Mill Lane. He was fortunate too in that Nutter was a well-read man, indeed a member of the Bull Hotel book club, and thus took time from his work to share information with such a celebrated author as Pickwick.

Relevant historical notes were jotted as he explored the building, sketching a plan as he toured - how in fact there was not one but two watermills sharing the same building and two pairs of waterwheels side by side. The Bishops' Mill on the right was the older and was mentioned in the Domesday Book but the King's had become more important - indeed during the centuries when the two had been in competition there had been rules drawn up preventing the Bishop's Mill from working until the King's had started. Then there was the third mill across the pool at Newnham which had anciently to wait until the King's miller had blown a horn ... it seemed all so complicated that Pickwick having noted it later found it still unclear.

But James Nutter had little time for history. Life for a miller was far too complex, as he explained.

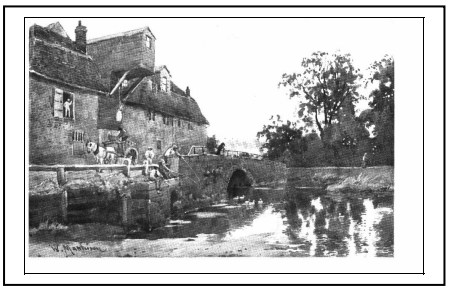
39

"My family - the Nutters - have been millers for generations", the Kings mill owner James Nutter confided, "but these days one just cannot get the right sort of men to work the watermills - they plague me, full of gossip and full of beer.

"One evening I was talking with Banham and I said to Newby to go to the mill pool and see what they are doing. He soon returned and said 'I have caught them, Joshua's two sons holding a candle and Brown the millwright filling his pocket with millings out of the sack'. When I got there away ran Brown but I examined the boy, who confessed. I told Joshua he must leave his place, and as for Brown went to his house, saw the stuff, who owned to taking it for his pigs. I warned him to keep off the premises. Next day Brown's master called, Mickle the millwright, sorry for the night's business, and would I have him turn him away. I had no desire to injure the man, and did not desire to make a noise about it.

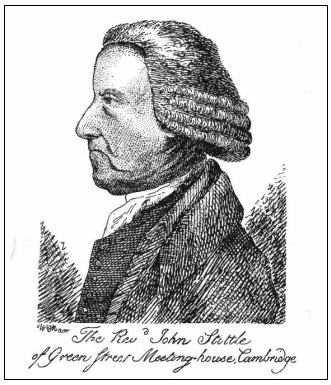
"Our busiest period is from October but we are so dependent on the river levels - what with the drought there just is not enough water for all the mills to work at once so we have an agreement with the others millers about sharing the water, one have it one day, the other the next.

That means sometimes we have to work on Sundays and even Christmas day - though the men grumble & say they would rather work or get drunk on Sundays than do anything on Xmas day and for days after they become very troublesome, lurking after Xmas boxes and loath to work. Then on December 29th I found them drinking together over the fire, the mill running unattended. I said but little, they scampered as soon as they saw me. They will not work unless I am standing over them - but I cannot be there all the time.



"I have other mills, an oil-mill at Shelford and the one at Grantchester - which was immortalised by Chaucer in the slanderous Reeve's Tale. You recollect the start of his poem "At Trumpington, not far from Cambridge stood, Across a pleasant stream, a bridge of wood; Near it a mill, in low and plashy ground. Where corn from all the neighbouring parts was ground". But others always quote to me the other stanzas "But millers will be thieves; he used to steal Slyly, and artfully, much corn and meal." But I am a religious man and this distresses me.

"I mentioned it once to Rev Stittle who was minister at the chapel in Green Street. He was a wonderful man, born at Madingley and a hedger and thresher who could read but not write. But you should have heard him preach. He could match old Simeon at Holy Trinity church and some of Simeon's crowd used to come to our chapel - but he didn't mind, in fact he sent Stittle a regular quarterly allowance which he said was for 'shepherding my stray sheep'.

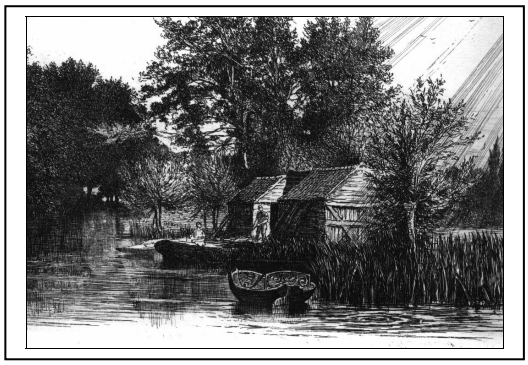


"Mind you undergraduates used to abuse him - when he was being carried over Magdalene Bridge in his sedan chair they would tell the bearers to drop him over the bridge into hell. But he always had an answer - I keep a sketch of him here in my office though he's been dead now 25 year. But what he would say about Pemberton owning the river I can't think - there's been a fuss over that ... "

As Pickwick left the Kings Mill he turned his back on Mill Pool and set off towards Coe Fen attracted by the cry from a boatman: "Trips to Paradise, God willing - but to Grantchester only if Mr Pemberton lets yer"

This was something to be investigated, though he had had enough river trips already for one day.

"Lovely day for a trip to Paradise, sir - just up the river a smidgeon". Using his skills he engaged the boatman in conversation.



"Well we call it Paradise - but then the Garden of Eden's the other side of town. Its a wonderful place for growing flowers. You see there was a Mr Rowe - come of a Cornish family - who were the first to grow early vegetables for the London markets. Anyway they say he came to Cambridge in 1740 and finding some good soil at Paradise Garden in Grantchester he proceeded to produce in a scientific way the Cornish system of forcing early plants there. His son Richard, an accomplished botanist, got in with a propagator of bulbs in Holland and so studied their habitat that he outstripped all others in the production of beautiful flowers.

“Then disaster struck; first his wife died while he was building the Paradise House, then there was bad weather and what with one thing and another he was thrown in Cambridge Castle for debt. Well his son had to beg a bed and mess of milk from Mrs Soward, cowkeeper at Newnham, and meals from others. But every day he hawked early vegetables about the streets of Cambridge from Paradise Garden to raise funds to get his father free - and eventually he did so - but not through his gardening.

“You see three Fellow-commoners - the rich undergraduates - got hold of some of that Trinity audit ale and they took it to some night watchman in his hut in King Street who they regaled until he got so drunk he fell asleep. Then they picked up his hut with him in it - and pitched it into the river.

“Well the college authorities got to hear about this and gated them for the rest of the term as well as setting them 500 lines of Ovid for each to copy. Well Rowels son, who was a good penman, went and offered to write these out for them. This they readily agreed to so he sat up all night and did the job so well that they paid him enough money to free his father from the Castle. Whats more one of them - a Jesus man - was so impressed that he got him the job of private secretary to the tutor of Jesus - that's been the making of him

“There's a pub there now, kept by Hyde and that's a popular place for the grads to swim - though you have to watch this river - why there was a carpenter drowned there only last year when he was supposed to be working - some put it down to their home-brewed ales. Its lovely during the dry season but when the floods come that’s a different matter. During those floods of 1795 - perhaps you remember it - they say the water stood seven foot deep in the house and the occupants were in fear of the house giving way. Mr Beales the coalman sent provisions out to them by barge and some of their furniture floated all the way to Silver Street bridge.”

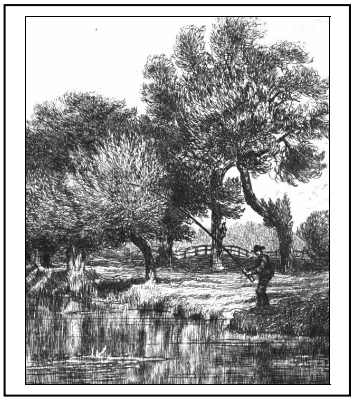
41

Pickwick waited whilst the boatman, Mr Hawes, broke off to supervise the return of one of his craft from the direction of Grantchester.

"I've had a rum time of it lately - all because of that court case" Hawes confided. "Colonel Pemberton of Trumpington Hall brought an action against me for trespass - he said I broke a chain he'd put across the river purposely to stop boats going that way. And yes I had - but I said that the river was navigable by all the Queen's subjects, at all times and with all kinds of boats and barges.

"I got a number of people to testify about it. There was William Shildrick who's known the river for 30 years and could says he'd seen Mr Howard' barges on it nearly all that time and for the last 15 or 16 years pleasure boats too. Old Thomas Okey - he's 72 years old now and lived at Grantchester since he was 15. Well he's a farmer, rents land from Pemberton near the river and seen plenty of boats - you know he even remembered Grantchester when there was a ford at the mill - seems there was no public highway past the mill till 1789, but you used to be able to pass when it was flooded but there's been a road there 30 years or more

"Then there was John Banks from Fen Ditton who worked over 50 years for old Mr Wheeler the basket-maker who had osier-holts on the river beyond where Pemberton put his chain. Well he'd brought the osiers himself down by boat to Coe Fen where they used them for making baskets. He'd seen members of the University in their boats as well as the flour barges going from Kings Mill to Grantchester several times. Of course he didn't say he'd seen boats all the time, well only 10 in 40 years and then only in the good weather but we only needed one or two to make our case.



"We got other people to say the same, but they were only fishermen like John Richardson and he couldn't say how many different boats there were, or if it was just the same one going past but John Collis - he's 80 now - and knew the river forty years could say he'd seen 1, 2 or even 3 boats at the same time. But they didn't really stand up well when old Pemberton's lawyers got on to them.

But then we got our star witness. An old gentleman, member of the University for over 50 years - name of Henry Gunning". Pickwick started remembering his stagecoach companion, and the cheque he still had in his pocket.

Hawes was continuing. "Mr Gunning said how he used to stay with his mother in Gantchester back in 1789 in a house just right beside the river. He remembered seeing the occasional boat - funnies he called them - which you don't seen now. Then when he was walking in to Cambridge he had seen flour barges and other loaded with building materials to mend the Grantchester mill - the one that old Nutter owns. There weren't many of them, but you see there was never a boat-letter on this stretch of river before and them that wanted to go that way used to have to carry their boats up from below Mill Pool. Then the town clerk - F.I. Gunning - brought out the old corporation documents dating back to 1647 which added to our case and things looked good. But then Pemberton's lawyer started.

42

Hawes, the boat letter from behind King’s Mill, grew graver when he recalled the proceedings he had. recently under-gone in court when accused of trespass on the River Cam near Grantchester

"Pemberton"s lawyer tried to make out that it was no wonder millers and osier-growers and the like took their boats on the river but that didn't mean the river was public and the people had rights of navigation at all times and in all seasons for the purpose of commerce. The main problem was the pleasure boats and I have to say they've not been common except for the last few years.

He said Col Pemberton had been away from Trumpington – well he was in Ireland with his regiment till 1816, arid then had been living on the Continent when I established this depot here. He was worried that lots of people boating up the river, for the fun of it would knock several hundred pounds of value off his property - that it was wrong for him to lose his rights just because without his knowledge a few boats had trespassed on his waters

That took the jury a very long time to reach the verdict – they kept coming back to the judge and asking for extra guidance on this and that - but in the end they come down can my side - and business has been booming every since

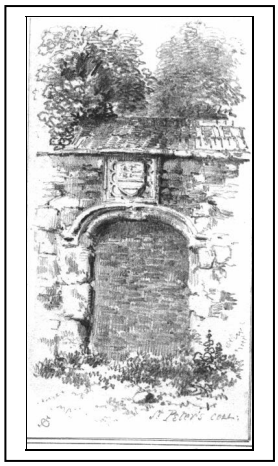
"You see until recently you hardly ever saw people in boats apart from the grads who muck about on the old flat-bottomed garden punts and that'll never catch on. The first to hire out rowing boats was a man named Halliday who lived near the Fort St George - he had only a dozen boats, bet then he brought one from Ramsey, which was the best on the river. John Cross went to work with him and there was only them let out boats. 'Then Cross went into business on his own, built his own boats – but never let them go beyond the Mills. Cross sold up after 5 years to a man named Sapsford who continued to let boat till he died about 24 years ago.

Its only been about 14 to 15 years ago that boats started to go above the King's Mill, towards Grantchester, and they was always damaged by being pulled across the land and the oars got broken since the river's not suitable for rowing along there.

"Now let me see – a man named Saunders came after Sapsford and then it was Meadows. He had a sailing boat which was always used between the Sluice and the Great Bridge – and then he was succeeded by King whose still got his premises there, only a little higher up the river since they removed the old sluice at the Fort St George. He had an apprentice, Logan and he's been letting out boats for about 11 years now.

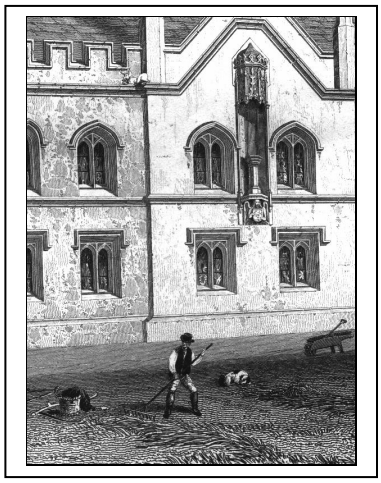
"Now I started as Mr King's helper and let out boats near Silver Street bridge. But then about 3 years since I bought the boats off him, pulled them over the land at the back of King's Mill for a while, then moved here six months ago. Before that I refused to let the boats go towards Grantchester but they went there anyway. I thought if they wanted to go that way then I ought to try to help them, so I hired a piece of land off the Corporation, put up this tenement and started this business. I've go 30 boats now. Take a trip to Paradise I tell them – but remember to come back again

43



The afternoon now proving pleasant Pickwick decided to continue his stroll along the river, south of Kings Mill through the rough pasture he knew to be Coe Fen, dotted with cows and festooned with clothes lines. His eyes alighted on an ancient wall running alongside and in it an equally ancient gate ornamented with a coat of arms.

He crossed to it but found it completely bricked up. Whatever its original use it was no longer in service. Then, nearer the town he spotted another opening, this one guarded by an ancient wooden gate. Looking around to ensure he was unobserved he placed his shoulder against it and pushed. Slowly it creaked open and he stepped inside, leaving the gate open to enable a speedy exit should it be necessary. He found himself in a garden of some one-and-a-half acres, overlooked by yet more of the modern building which seemed to blight everywhere, and standing stock still and watching him intently stood a full-grown deer.



It was the animal which recovered from the shock quicker and with a bound it had sought the freedom of the Coe fen beyond the wall that enclosed the smallest deer park in the country. Pickwick could only watch with horror as the deer disappeared, a horror compounded by an irate bellow from behind him. He turned to face a college gardener who left him in no doubt as to the monstrous thing he had done.

"You, sir are trespassing - this is private, college land - it has been part of Peterhouse for hundreds of years. How can this college hope to keep its deer safe when numbskulls like you leave gates open - its bad enough that undergraduates use the ground to play cricket, quoits and football - how can I keep the deer settled in such conditions.

"If this carries on we shall need to keep a porter constantly on top of those steps" - he pointed to a flight which rose just high enough for a man to peer over the top of the ancient wall - "watching for trespassers like they used to watch for floods when it was built 350 years ago. The college even bricked up that old water gate built for the use of the Bishop of Ely when he came visiting by boat when the river flowed beside the wall of this college. That other is a gate for Fellows' use, not a gate for strangers to enter".

There was very little Pickwick could think of to pacify the irate fellow. He heard himself stammering some excuse and mentioning all the names he could think of who might act as some sort of guarantor of his status. Henry Gunning ... Mrs Alice Bond ... no reaction, Will Spread ... John Brown

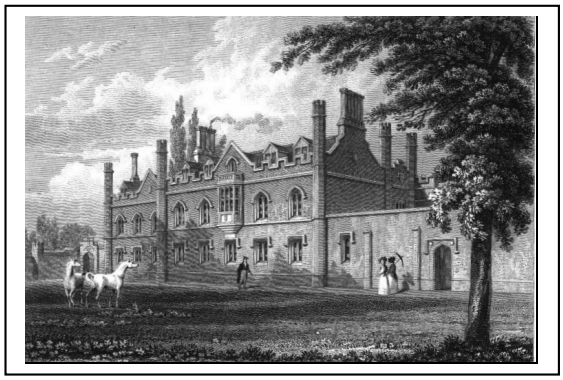
"Ah you know old John, do you - excellent fellow - learned me to play billiards - now he is a good chap. Any friend of John Brown's cannot be all bad. Of course he's not to everybody's taste, but he's what I call a character. And if there's one thing we know about in Peterhouse well it is characters.

“You take the late Master, Dr Barnes - you have heard of him surely - Master here for fifty years till he died last May - one of the biggest mistakes the college made in all its history.”

44

Seated peacefully under the shade of a tree in Peterhouse Pickwick listened to the tale of Master Francis Barnes

"It was way back in 1787 that it all started. It was an open secret that the Bishop of Ely - it was Dr Yorke in those days - wanted to appoint a family friend, Rev. Doctor Longmire, to be next Master of Peterhouse. But the college Fellows didn't want him - he'd upset them over something or other and they thought he was always boasting too much about his own achievements. They wanted the Rev George Borlase so the college puts his name up - with his friend Francis Barnes as their second candidate. Well they reckoned how Barnes was so unsuitable that nobody would ever appoint him and so Borlase would get the post.



"Now the Bishop, who was what we call the Visitor, had the power to appoint the Master from one of the two candidates the College put forward, but this Longmire objected on some technical ground or other, the Bishop declared the other candidates invalid and appointed his friend anyway. The College Fellow's were up in arms and took the Bishop to the Court of King's Bench - that went on and on. In the end the Court said the Bishop should appoint one of the people the College wanted.

"And I think how the Bishop decided to get his own back and chose Dr Barnes. Barnes didn't want to be Master, the college fellows didn't want him and he was universally regarded as altogether unfitted for the post. To make it worse he just lived on and on in a long and inglorious reign.

"Take that letter the college got in 1817 - some anonymous donor offered to fund new Fellowships and Scholarships and the sum they mentioned was tremendous. It was so big that the Master decided it had to be a practical joke and wouldn't answer it and it was only because the Bursar and Professor Smyth bothered to journey down to London that they found it was actually true and the college account at the bank increased by L20,000 in hard cash. Thats how we came by the money for that fine new court - named after Francis Gisborne - and opened only twelve years ago

"As one of the Fellows said when Barnes finally died in May this year, aged 95 years, he had 'too lamentably demonstrated how little he was qualified for the discharge of any duty which required the exercise of high notions of morality and a careful regard to what is just, decent and venerable'. But he was thrifty, looked after the college buildings and managed the estates at Cherry Hinton and Bottisham effectively, though of course the Enclosure Acts considerably increased their value, even if it did upset the locals there.

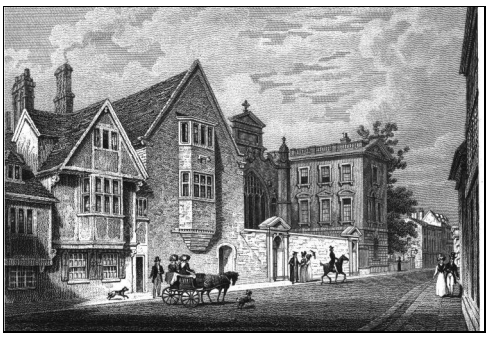
Old Dighton made a sketch of him in 1810 - you could probably get one from Harraden's print shop in King's Parade - that shows what a sort of a chap he was.

Though of course the real tale that always hangs around Peterhouse goes back a bit further and involves that chap who wrote "Elegy in a country churchyard". Now I can't stop to tell it to you, but you have a word with the porter across the road at Pembroke.

45

Pickwick was pleased enough to escape through the main gate of Peterhouse without encountering more than a rough glance from a college porter. He certainly did not to be regaled yet again by the story of Thomas Gray.

Surely it was known to everybody already - he would certainly not fill his notebooks with the account of how that famous poet who in 1748 had seen his house at Cornhill in London burn down had tried to ensure his safety in the upper floors of Peterhouse - a college where ever day his neighbours made greater progress in their prime interests - drunkenness. Quite rightly, in Pickwick's view, Gray had taken steps to ensure his escape in the event of another fire by installing a rope ladder which could be attached to a bar fixed at his window so that he could shimmy down it to the street below in the event of conflagration.

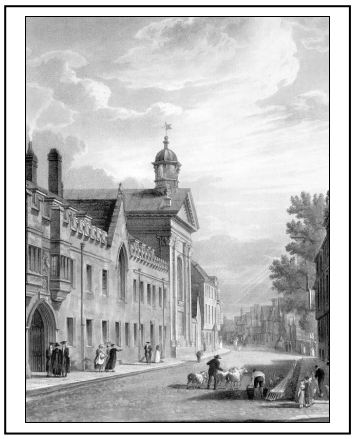


It would have been nice though, he mused, to have been able to add a definite truth to the

mixed stories that followed. The principal version was that various of the rich Fellow-Commoners (that class of undergraduates who had more money than brains) - including Lords Percival and Egmont, had placed a tub of water under his window and ordered their servant, Joe Draper to climb the wooden stairs to Gray's room and yell "Fire" at the top of his voice. All London was full of the story how Gray, woken from his slumbers and in mortal fear quickly unrolled his rope ladder, and without waiting to dress, climbed down it - straight into the tub of water from which he was rescued by his tormenters, wrapped up in the coat of a passing watchman and carried back into Peterhouse.

Yet there was a second version - how that the noble Lords had been waiting with their hunting crops to whip him back up his ladder, but that Gray had been too alert for them and, suspecting trickery, had merely popped his nightcapped head out of the window, sniffed the air and gone back to bed.

Whatever the truth there would be no doubt that the tale would be told and retold, not least at High Table where the poet would have to confront his tormenters who would be sure to set the table in a roar with their account of their own cleverness..



No wonder Gray changed college and crossed the road to Pembroke - only to find his fear of fire once more brought into play when in 1768 there had been an real outbreak and the rooms opposite his own destroyed, the whole wing of the college being saved by two men who had been very late at their nocturnal devotions and were able to raise the alarm at 2 o'clock in the morning, bringing fire engines and men very speedily to the scene.

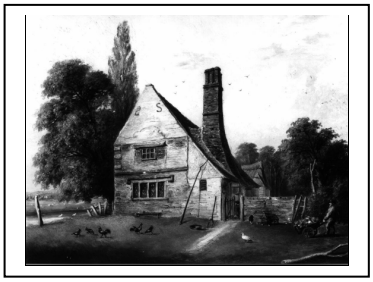
Pickwick was intent in his concentration on the ferocity of fire when he found his foot plunged into water above his shoe. As he fell on the dusty road he cursed - why on earth did Cambridge have to endure these open ditches on either side of Trumpington Street, they might be a boom to the animals driven down it but were a trap for the unwary visitor.

What was worse they made him the centre of attention and, for the second time he was aware of crowds gathering to laugh at his plight

46

Pickwick staggered to his feet from the dirt of Trumpington Street, gasped and sat down again quickly. His ankle throbbed painfully and he was pleased enough to plunge it once more into the small stream of water running alongside the road.

Now what was he to do, for it was surely undignified for a man of his stature - famous throughout England since the publication of his "Pickwick Papers" just two years earlier - to sit with his foot in a ditch.
"Don't worry, mister, I'll look after you". The words came from a youth of about 15 years and were spoken with a strange accent.



"I know what its like to have a bad foot. Why I've been lame myself since I was seven and it has been a great hindrance to me in my labour" - this from a youngster make Pickwick smile to himself. "But there's far worse than that. You see I was born in the year of 1823 at Swavesey and before I was seven years of age I was taken with scarlet fever and at the same time a great swelling in my throat and a while swelling on my knee - which is the cause of my lameness. I well remember not being able to move any part of my frame but my left wrist - I could just raise that but I had no strength any higher than my

wrist.

"My doctor was a very austere man and he used to come and frightened me so that I dreaded to see him come. He would turn the clothes down and pull me about as if he had got a block of wood or piece of iron to handle that had no life in them. I remember him coming one day and asking my mother for a basin. He took a knife out of his pocket and came to me - I was so frightened I thought he was going to cut my throat and that I should die. He cut the swelling that was on my throat and I felt a little easier from that but the fever had not abated, I was still as helpless as ever. Then he ordered leeches to be laid on me ..."

Leeches! - the word came back to Pickwick - was it just a day or so ago he had been on a stagecoach near Fowlmere and somebody had mentioned the wonderful leeches of that place. But his companion was continuing.

"By now my parents patience with that doctor had come to an end and they borrowed a horse and cart and brought me to Cambridge to see a Doctor Zachary, and when he saw me he said they must not set their affections on this child - said that in front of me. Then he ordered me to be put in a hot bath morning and night and I was to take my medicine when I was in the bath. My mother used to put the water in a washtrough and roll my shirt up under my armholes. This medicine was to be ten drops in a half teacup full of cold water and one time some of the medicine was spilt on my shirt and it burned all the fore part of my shirt out in a very short time and so you may guess it was not very pleasant to taste

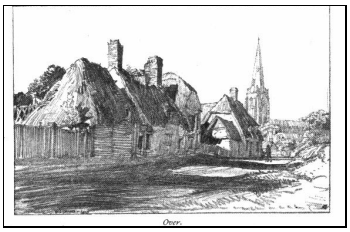
"But I recovered from the scarlet fever and my strength increased and I'm now head horsekeeper to Mr Dodson - that's reckoned to be the first step in agricultural labour. And if I can take such a step, so can you". And so doing he hauled Pickwick to his feet.

47

With the help of his young companion Pickwick rose to his feet from the side of the ditch in Trumpington Street, only to gasp with pain and sit down again. Henry Bowd, for such was the name of his helper, looked on with concern, other passers by just passed by.

Perhaps if he sat a short while longer his ankle might improve, meanwhile he placed it once more in the stream of water, a welcome relief from what was now a sultry August afternoon. Pickwick
launched into an account of Thomas Gray's escape from an upper window of Peterhouse, just behind him, but when he mentioned "fire" his companions face turned pale.

"Don't mention fire, I cannot stand fires - they scare me. It was about 12 years ago, when I was three, I was visiting some relations in the next village to us - Over, and it was August and that night my dad was passing Mr Bicheno's farmyard and he saw a little blaze right between a cart hovel and a barn - not a place you'd expect to see light for nobody would ever go there. But before he could raise the alarm the whole barn was ablaze. It spread so quickly - to Mr Few's rick-yard and then to Thomas Gifford's premises in the front street.



"Well the fire engines turned out - the one from Longstanton was first - well they ought to know the way because they'd been called out the week before to another blaze. They turned their attention to Bicheno's barn but that was burning so fiercely they couldn't save it - and when the roof finally collapsed that sent flames right over the fire-engine and that caught fire and was burned to a cinder - the men working it were lucky to get away alive.

“There were other engines too - the Norwich Union and Hertfordshire and about 200 Over women formed a line and passed buckets of water up to fight the fire. But then some of them ran
off when it seemed the flames were going to spread to their own cottages - everywhere people were carrying out furniture and stacking it in the street - only to find that other people carried it off when their back was turned - we reckon it was people from Cambridge who could see the fire and turned out for a look

"Do you know at least five farms, fifteen barns full of corn, three dove cotes and seven cottages were destroyed. Next morning we went to see - and everywhere was the stench of the smoke and
then flames would start up again whenever somebody ruttled round looking for anything - some people looking for their belongings, others for other people's. Nearly £10,000 worth of damage was caused, they say. There was a big collection for the relief of the sufferers - lots of people gave money - Francis Pym give 5 guineas, John Wayman five shillings - anything they could afford

"And it was all started deliberately - well it had to be - there was that fire earlier in the week and some more later that year. So don't you talk to me about fires, I hate them."

48

A small crowd had gathered around Pickwick and his young friend as they sat outside Peterhouse, listening to Henry Bowd's tale of the Over fire - and fire was something each seemed to have a tale about.

One chipped in "I was there on that night - November 1836 - when that fire broke out in Marshall and Bell's warehouse on the corner of Pease-hill and Wheeler Street - half-past eleven that was and we real thought the whole of the area would be burned out - including Mortlock's Bank - now that would have been justice I say - but there was soon a good crowd there and you have got to admit that them university students they played their part well. But the real heroes were the Norwich Union fire engine. They got there first of all the others and together they put it out in about two hours"

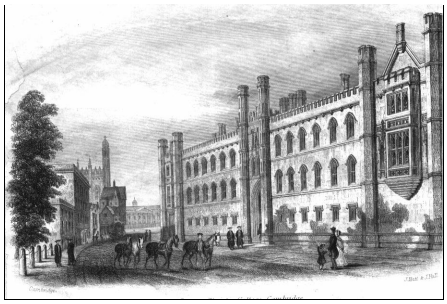
"That weren't another Stallan job" asked one man, with a laugh - "that were the way to make some money". All the assembled company burst into laughter, except Pickwick who had not the slightest idea what they were talking about. Suddenly there was a change in the conversation - "there's old Fynn - wonder if he's struck gold again".

The object of their attention was a stout figure, resplendent in top hat, white scarf, frock coat and checked trousers. He turned his head towards them and crossed the street in their direction, pausing to allow a string of ponies to pass and giving a swipe at a passing dog which growled at him.

"Come along gentlemen, this is no place to stand and gossip" he boomed in a voice calculated to be heard some distance off, then he winked and in a much lower tone "hoppit lads, there's you'll get me in the wrong if I'm seen with you lot - meet you in the Eagle later". The crowd dispersed, save Pickwick and friend, who explained their plight

"You come along with me sir", and with that he wrapped his arm around the hobbling Pickwick and escorted him across the street, back towards town and through the imposing gate of what appeared to be a new college. Glancing round to see he was not observed he took them into the porter's lodge and sat them in some style.

"Welcome to Bene't college - at least thats what it used to be, now they've changed the name - 'Corpus Christi' it is now, one of the oldest of colleges, despite appearance. They changed the name once they'd put up all this new block. Well you see once the war with Boneparte was over there was far more gentlemen wanting to come to Cambridge than there was places for in the colleges, building materials dropped in price, there were lots of cheap labour to be had for the asking and this college had accumulated thousands of pounds in the kitty. So they decided to get Wilkins to build this new court - hundred of people turned out to watch them lay the foundation stone - street was packed, windows and tops of houses overlooking it was crowded and that were finished by 1827. Of course we charge students more for modern rooms than the draughty old ones in old court, back of St Bene't's church. Right little gold mine I reckon - and that’s on top of the buried treasure they found"



49

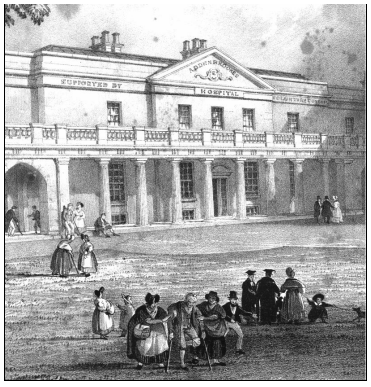
Seated in his porter's lodge at Corpus Christi, John Fynn dived his hand into a pocket and, glancing round to make sure they were unobserved, produced a gold coin. He passed it to Pickwick who studied it intently. It was certainly ancient, dating from the reign of Kings Charles I.

Fynn explained how he'd come by it. "During the building of the college a tenement was added to the west of the Eagle Inn, in Bene't street. When they were digging the foundations the workmen had to cut through the floor of an old cellar and they found an earthenware jar. It was full of coins - about four of five thousand of them, all silver, and all sizes from farthing to a crown and all more than 200 years old. They called me in straight away - well almost straight away any rate. Then, bless me, they found another one. And that had about 200 coins - all gold - a little bit like this one in fact", and he spat on it for luck and slipped it back in his pocket.

"Well that caused all sorts of argument - the builder, James Howell, said as he'd found it so he should keep it, the Corporation said it belonged to them and the College said it was their's. Well they sealed it all up tight and put it in the bank while the lawyers debated about it - and then the Government claimed it as treasure trove. Anyway the Treasury finally gave it to the college provided they paid the expenses and allowances to the mason and workman. The college sold it off in bits and pieces (except one or two, like) at an auction in November 1827 and nobody really knows who put it there in the first place.

"Me, well I've got a nice little job. I've been porter here for 34 years now. I get a wage for keeping an eye on the gate, £4 for listing them who go to chapel - and we've not had the fuss here they had at Trinity, thank God, and £5 for bars and bolts - making sure them that should be inside are in by the right time - and collecting fines for any coming in late. Then when we get a hard winter there's extra money for snow - clearing it away and collecting some to keep the food cold. There's a new little earner the college brought in in 1827 - any member of college walking on the grass has to pay a fine of 1/-. Me and the under-porter William Johnson are having a slight disagreement with the Fellows over this because the rules say any member of college and some of the Fellows say that it don't mean them and we say it does.

"Mind you I don't think you'll be walking very far for a while" and he unfastened Pickwick's shoe to reveal an ankle swollen and red. "What are we to do with you. There is Addenbrooke's hospital up the road but they only let people in on Wednesday mornings and you have to be recommended by a Benefactor or Subscriber. Anyway you have to be clean when you go there - and you look a bit dirty to me - (though not



as bad as Jemmy Gordon - have you heard about him - ah, you have). You also have have a change of linen, and money to pay for washing it" Pickwick rejoined that he had money - and produced Gunning's cheque on Mortlock's Bank. "Well that settles it then - you can afford to pay for medicines, they certainly won't take you"

50

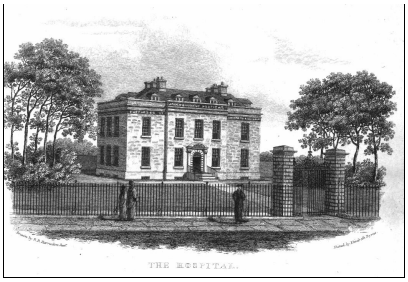
Pickwick was sitting in the Porter's lodge in Corpus Christi's new college, his swollen ankle in a chamber pot full of cold water, whilst Head Porter, John Fynn was extolling the virtues of Addenbrooke's Hospital.

"No matter how good the medicine is there, I reckon you could soon get fed up with the food. I talked to someone who was n a few year's back. You go in on Wednesdays and you get a pint of milk-pottage for breakfast, rice pudding for dinner and two ounces of cheese for supper. They give you rice pudding on Fridays too otherwise its half a pound of boiled mutton or beef for dinner and a pint of milk broth for supper every night - apart from Friday, then you get an ounce of butter. Though I suppose as how that's palatial fare for some of the poor folk that go there

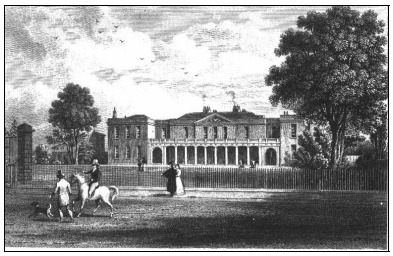
"We're lucky to have a hospital anyway - and that's all down to an old student of Catharine Hall - just across the road there. He did well for himself, was elected a Fellow in 1704 and practiced medicine from his rooms in the college - but his best act was marrying the Master's niece and going to France for a proper medical education - well Cambridge teaching in those days were not really thought much of. But however much learning he got it didn't do him a great deal of good because he died when he was 39 years old - he was practicing medicine in Buntingford then.

"They do say he was a odd chap - his maid, Mary Collis said he was into witchcraft - thought he could predict the future by communicating with the dead and all that. Do you know one of the last things he did was to have them burn all his writings in the courtyard of his house, Littlecourt.

"When they read the will they found he had left over £4,500 to set up a hospital for poor people in Cambridge. That was in 1719 but there was such a to-do about it - there were court cases, and one of the trustees went bankrupt. Anyway it was nearly 50 years before the Hospital was opened and by then the court cases had cost so much there was not enough money left to buy all the beds and other furniture. Then they got an Act of Parliament to set up a proper Corporation to run it. Even then there were problems - the first Treasurer they appointed was a man from St John's college and he was later suspended from his degree for lending money to students at extortionate rates.



"But in the end Addenbrooke's Hospital - they named it after John Addenbrooke who'd left the money - opened in 1766. It was just a small place then, but they've added to it since. Mind you even that was a struggle - they had to apply to the Court of Chancery for permission to use some money and the court judgement took five years. They got so fed up waiting they said that if they didn't get permission to make the hospital bigger they would erect a lunatic asylum in the grounds instead. Then they got an architect to draw up designs for the new extensions - local chap - he's Mayor now, name of Charles Humfrey - and that went over budget by more than £1,000 but at least it's open, even if you can't get in"

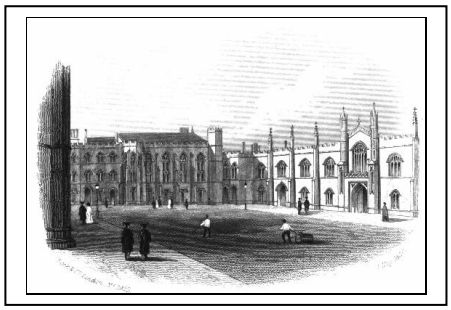


51

Pickwick glanced up as a figure entered the main gate of Corpus Christi college, passed the Porter's Lodge and entered the court beyond. John Fynn, Head Porter, had noticed him almost before his foot entered college property

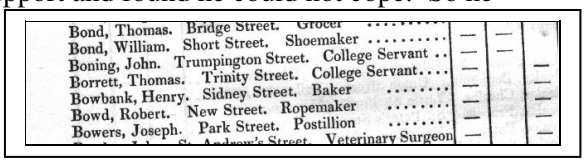
"Now that is one man I have a lot of time for" - Fynn confided. "Perhaps he locked up more women in the Spinning House than he ought to have done, but then he is a clergyman (all of them are here). Some think he's strange because he's got this passion for beetles, but then a lot of people do these days. But Prof John Henslow did right for my old friend Thomas Borrett, even though he was only a servant

"Now you know something about parliamentary elections and all the chicanery that can go on - and there's plenty of that here in Cambridge, what with bribing and treating, but then on top of that there's bullying by members of the University. Thomas Borrett was a college gyp for many years.



"Now a gyp does the cleaning, runs errands for those living on a particular staircase and ekes out his money by working as a waiter or even helping out as porter from time to time. People have a rum idea about them, think they take too many tips, help themselves from students rooms and the like - well they do say the name "gyp" comes from the Greek word for vulture.

"But Thomas had a vote and he had strong political convictions. He always supported the Reform candidate, even though all the rest of the servants felt they had to vote for the Tories because that's who the college supported. When people found out they stopped employing Borrett for all the extra little jobs, like serving at their private dinners. He had a wife and family to support and found he could not cope. So he set up a business as a grocer and was then sacked from being a gyp because somebody said there was a rule that a college servant could not keep a shop - even though several others did.



Bond, Thomas. Bridge Street. Grocer .....
Bond, William. Short Street. Shoemaker .....
Boning, John. Trumpington Street. College Servant ..
Borrett, Thomas. Trinity Street. College Servant....
Bowbank, Henry. Sidney Street. Baker .....
Bowd, Robert. New Street. Ropemaker .....
Bowers, Joseph. Park Street. Postillion .....
St. Andrew's Street. Veterinary Surgeon

"Still Thomas thought that he could make his shop pay, by supplying goods to the undergraduates - he knew what they liked, after all the years he worked for them. Now the way it works is that undergraduates buy things and the shop sends their bill to college tutors who authorise it to be paid. Only they wouldn't - and they refused to recommend him to their pupils.

"He had no option but to pack it all in and try and find a job where he wouldn't be persecuted for his political opinions. He's left Cambridge and now has a position in the London University. Now I think Henslow had a hand in that - and he certainly spoke up against the treatment they gave Tom. He made himself very unpopular with senior members of the University, why somebody even wrote "Henslow, common informer" on the walls of this college. I could never find out who did it, I never saw it done, but its there clear as day and I can't shift it. He's left Cambridge himself now - and I blame that Charles Darwin"

52

Pickwick knew about Charles Darwin, the young naturalist who had just returned from a five year round-the-world voyage on HMS Beagle, the ship loaded down with new varieties of this

and species of that - in fact the London museums were now so full of new discoveries that people were despairing of ever having the time to record them all. But what had Darwin to do with Prof. of Botany, John Henslow of Corpus Christi college in Cambridge; John Fynn sketched in some of the details.

"Darwin was going to be a vicar when he came up to Christ's college in 1827 when he was 18 years old. The college was so full he had to take lodgings in the town - over Bacon's tobacconist shop in Sidney Street. We reckon that there are two types of undergraduates - varmint men and reading men. The varmint men have all the fun - give late night feasts, drink like fish, smoke all the time, gamble and go to Barnwell for the women. We porters like them, there's more scope for tips and perks, and we can help them out when they get into trouble.

"The reading men attend lectures, never miss chapel, win all the prizes, don't have a passion for anything but work. But Darwin couldn't settle to study, he soon frittered his allowance away, ran up bills - and got passionate about beetles.

"That was the real craze then - beetles. They used to pay a couple of us to go down to Mill Pool when the barges got in. The coal barges weren't no good, we looked out for those bringing stuff in from the fens and then we'd ruttle round in the old reeds at the bottom of the boat and see what beetles we could find. That was a profitable occupation, and if we found a rare one they'd usually be one of the grads we knew who would pay a bit more just to add it to his collection.

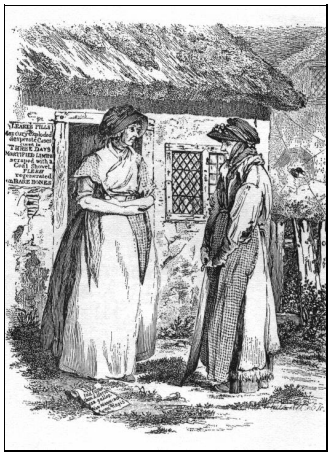
"That's how Darwin met Prof Henslow. A group of them used to go out beetle hunting on Friday nights around Bottisham and Swaffham Bulbeck where they met up with the vicar, Revd Jenyns, a bachelor who kept a proper naturalists calendar, bit like Gilbert White. One day they were out looking for new specimens and Darwin spotted something called an insect-eating bladderwort on the other side of a muddy dyke. So he got one of the jumping poles and set off to vault over. Only thing is he didn't go fast enough, the pole got stuck in the mud and he slid down into the water up to his waist. Then he waded across to get this specimen for Prof Henslow.

"The Prof was really popular and was busy trying to get a new Botanic Garden established instead of the one we've got now at the back of the Guildhall. It worked too for seven years ago the University bought about 30 acres down the Trumpington Road.

"Then he got an invitation to join that five-year expedition on the Beagle - trip of a lifetime it would be to a botanist like him. Do you know he turned it down - recommended Darwin instead. You should see the piles and piles of things Darwin's sent here for him to examine, enough to fill a dozen museums - no wonder they're building that new one down the road!

53

Pickwick felt comfortable sitting in the Porter's lodge at Corpus Christi College. He did not feel comfortable when he tried to stand. But he could not stay there much longer, even porters had to work sometimes!



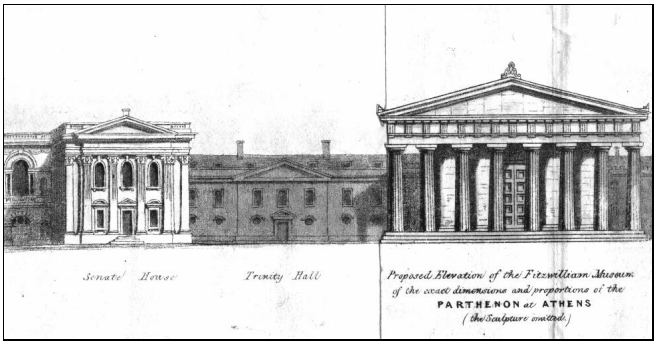
His young companion Henry Bowd was cudgling his brains in an attempt to remember any old fen remedies which might cure his swollen ankle. He recalled how his grandmother would apply a hot

pancake to relieve lumbago or a pain in the back - and how as it was a sin to waste the food - they would eat it afterwards. Then horseradish could be grated, soaked in boiling water and used as a poultice. Or how about an eel-skin garter - only that took too long to prepare, once you'd caught and skinned the eels they still had to be greased with fat, put in linen bags and buried in the peat before they would work. And that only cured rheumatism, that might not work on a sprained ankle. Mind you some people swore that the application of urine - provided that it was the first of the day - would cure chilblains, perhaps that would do the job. Or he would lend Pickwick the mole's foot he always carried to ward off all sorts of ailment.

Somehow none of that appealed to Pickwick's sensibilities. Nor did he relish the other country cure-all for aches and pains, a liberal dose of opium which fenwomen would serve to their children as poppy tea, using the white poppies which grew in every country garden. Of course here in Cambridge you could buy it easily in any chemist's shop - and there were always the quack doctors on the market selling all sorts of bottles of highly coloured medicines which would cure everything. No, he would need to seek more orthodox remedies, but he could not do so until he had got back to his hotel, the Castle Inn, in St Andrew's street.

Then Fynn had a brainwave - Doctor Barnes' bathchair. Pickwick knew all about the ancient Master of Peterhouse, but not that in his latter years he had made his way about Cambridge in such a contrivance. Fynn squibbled a note to his opposite number at Peterhouse and despatched the lad to deliver it.

"You know", Fynn said, "I was talking about the need for a bigger museum, but that's been a complicated story as well. You will have noticed all the building work going on just down Trumpington Street, where they're building the new Fitzwilliam Museum. Well some didn't think that ought to be there. First of all the University Senate wanted to build it next to Kings college. There was talk about it being put where the Bull Hotel now is, just across the road from Corpus. Then somebody had a plan to knock down the old buildings of Gonville and Caius college and build a replica of the Parthenon in Athens beside the Senate House. Some think that would have made a great improvement and Caius were keen to move - they would have come up beside Peterhouse - but old Pemberton wouldn't surrender his lease on the ground - have you heard about the fuss he's causing them boat people. So then they had to think again"



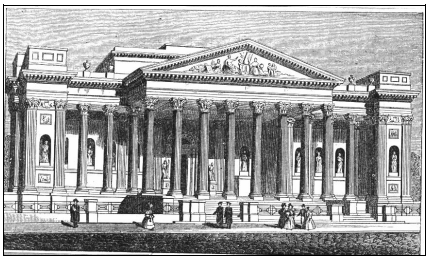
54

"When Richard, Viscount Fitzwilliam died he left the University his paintings, books and about £100,000 - now that was about", and here Henry Fynn, did a swift calculation, "about twenty-two years ago, yes I remember, 1816 - the year of them riots at Littleport when everybody thought there would be real trouble - but that's another story. Anyway they brought all the stuff up to Cambridge and had to find somewhere to put it. They decided on the Perse School buildings, just behind Corpus, in Free School Lane. Well that didn't have many scholars and they'd got a large room which was all right just for a temporary matter - and that's were it still is.

"As I told you they came up with one and idea and then another as to where to put a new building and then in 1821 they hit on

the site, beside Peterhouse. But the problem was the land was held on leases by various people who knew how the University wanted it and asked so much in compensation that the University refused to pay it and so decided to wait till all the leases ran out. They'd still be waiting but that the Perse School people asked for their building back in 1834. About the same time the University got another collection of about 200 paintings from a Daniel Mesman, which they've put in the new Pitt Press for the time being.

"So they put out advertisements for people to come up with designs and twenty-seven architects sent in thirty-six designs - well nobody really knew quite what the University was thinking of, not that they did either. They finally selected one by George Basevi but then there's been all sorts of changes and debates and alterations. They drew up plans and put them out to tender, but the contractor who they chose then said how he'd miscalculated and could he put the price up by £2,500.



They finally got round to laying the main foundation stone only last November. It was a massive block of Portland stone weighing nearly five tons and was laid by the Master of Pembroke College. So you see what with that and the new University Library - with its Mineralogy and Geology museums as well, being started in the September we shall soon have more new museums and libraries than we know what to do with. And it will be good for the guide-book makers too for in a few years Cambridge will have changed out of all recognition. Provided that is they ever finish any of them", and here he produced a sketch of the proposed Museum

Their conversation was interrupted by the return of Henry Bowd, complete with a most wonderful bath-chair. Pickwick was helped into it and pushed sedately down Bene't Street (keeping an eye
open for the apple-seller in front of Mortlock's Bank), along Petty Cury, passing the Wrestlers Inn where he had lost his money, and back to the Castle Inn. As they bumped along the rutted paths and roads, covered in dust from passing wagons, squeezed into alleys when two vehicles needed to pass each other he wondered that if this were the new improved Cambridge what must the old
have been like!

55

Pickwick's stately, though decidedly bumpy, progress towards the Castle Inn in St Andrew's street on that late August afternoon of 1838 was interrupted by an shouted command for them to stop
immediately. The bath chair ground to a halt and its pusher, young Henry Bowd from Over, overtook him, running at considerable speed - remarkable in one so handicapped by lameness

Pickwick turned round and found himself looking up into the face of a young Constable. "And what are you doing with Dr Barnes' chair?" Suddenly he felt all eyes on him, people paused as they passed to watch his discomfiture. Visions of arrest and imprisonment confronted him. But then he saw the twinkle in the policeman's eye and recognised his new acquaintance of the evening before, PC no.6 Robert Flynn, who was himself seeming somewhat the worst for wear.

The chair started forward again, propelled now by the Constable, but instead of continuing to the Castle, turned right under the archway of the Bird Bolt Inn where a rear door was always open for
a friendly bobby.

How, he asked did his friend come to be so decidedly battered. "Well it was just the ordinary way of duty. Police are always being called to break up fights, and often find ourselves on the wrong side of the argument. After leaving you I had an active night. First there was a fight at the Stag and Pheasant
beer-house at Hyde Park Corner when a father and son had set about landlord Benjamin Pryke, smashing his pots - but we soon got that sorted. Then a few minutes afterwards I encountered a very drunken Lincolnshire labourer, Thomas Smith, who set about me. Now I can look after myself in the ordinary way of things but this lad had a dog with him - and that bit me something awful, right on the knee". Smith was due to spend two months in gaol if he could not come up with the resulting £5.00 fine - an immense sum, but meanwhile the constable was like Pickwick - hobbling.

It was, he learned, a good job, but they felt everybody was against them and as for the money - well a constable got just 17s. a week - only 3 shilling more than the commonest labourer and much below that of a carpenter or bricklayer - the artisan class from which they were selected. The wages were those recommended by Robert Peel. But now there was talk of reorganisation - of having separate night and day constables - the night watch getting 18s., the day boys just 14s. There were 22 constables at present, how many would stay on if those changes came in.

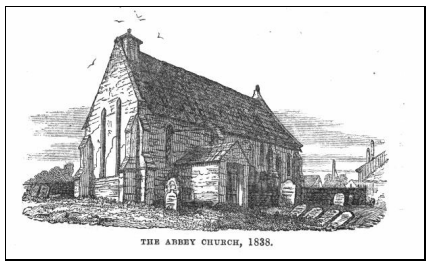
"And the whole force is under attack from councillors. Our Inspector has been accused of being absent for seven hours without leave, of receiving money not entered in the books, of being insolent, drunk and disorderly - and of locking people up and refusing them bail. What was wrong with that - the University did far worse in the Spinning House just down the road. In fact things have got to a pretty pass with the Inspector being suspended but refusing to stop working. And now there was a horrible, unsolved murder to worry about, in that most frightening area - Barnwell"

56

Pickwick was not sure he wanted to hear tales of murder, but his companion, P.C. Robert Flynn was in full flow.

"It was in September 1833 that it started. An old lady in Gas Lane went out one night to fetch water from the gravel pits and her pail hit something floating - a body, just bobbing about - now don't ask me how many other pails of water had been drawn from that pit before her's hit John Walls' head - but that Barnwell area, down the Newmarket Road, is a haunt of petty thieves, scoundrels and harlots.

"But the time the body was found it was well decomposed. At the inquest the surgeon said he couldn't see any marks of violence, but several other witnesses said there was marks on the face -
some said on one side, some said on the other, and some said his lip was cut. Anyway that stayed a mystery.



"Then in February this year a lad named Smith was in the White Hart pub in King Street when the conversation got around to Walls, and this lad said how he knew he'd been murdered, because he's
seen it happen. He said that he'd been with a harlot in Gas Lane, heard a scuffle in the street, looked out and seen three men fighting. One was knocked down, hit on the head with the butt of a gun and thrown into the pits.

"Well that matched up with something we knew earlier. You see the landlord of the Three Horse Shoes in East Road had told us that Walls had been drinking with two men, one of whom had been mending Walls' gun and had it with them. We'd later found that very gun hidden up the chimney of a chap called Howard but he'd had some excuses at the time and we had to let it drop.

"Anyway the whole thing came to court in March this year - and a right fiasco it was. This Smith lad was the only witness and he collapsed under examination. Well he said he'd been with a prostitute - but he was only 14 in 1833. The girl who used that house said she was in the family way in September 1833 and claimed she never knew him.

"His father said he was a habitual liar - had been ever since his skull had been fractured in a quarrel. Mind you the lad said he told lies to try and block out the memory of what he saw that night. Mind you others say he'd just wanted to prove himself to be a big man.

"Now they say that Walls just got drunk, was taking a short cut beside the pits and fell in - but knowing that Barnwell area I reckon there's still something to be found - you want details of Cambridge underworld, that's where you'll find it". I'll take you down there one day if you like"
But for now Pickwick only wanted his bed - and so together they made their way to the Castle.

57

Pickwick was sitting in a corner of the bar-room in the Castle Inn, St Andrew's street, Cambridge. He had dined well and was enjoying a long draught of beer, nursing his bruises and listening to the conversation of those around him. His arrival in a bath-chair had not gone unobserved - could not
have done so at an inn where the staff were attentive and friendly - but his reception had been good-natured, he had been assisted up to his room, and back down again washed, changed and refreshed. A half hour or so and he would once more climb those stairs and take to his bed.

All was peaceful until the inevitable happened - some inconsiderate, clumsy clot contrived to cloud his swollen ankle causing him to gasp with pain. Immediately all was concern and a gentleman having about him the status of a man of some standing came over, a pile of pamphlets in his hand.

"Might I introduce myself, Mr Pickwick. My name is Thomas Verney Okes - Doctor Okes. You have a problem, I have great experience with matters concerning the foot - in fact it was I myself who attended to that most celebrated of foot-afflicted persons, Elizabeth Woodcock herself - I have
set out all the details in this little booklet, newly reissued. It is a tale to be told indeed."

Pickwick peered at the proffered pamphlet purporting to recount the Providential preservation of Elizabeth Woodcock who had, it appeared, been lost in the snow for eight days and nights back in February 1799

"She set off back to Impington just as dusk was falling - but so was the snow. As she got near home she decided to take a short cut across a field but her horse took fright at the snowflakes and she dismounted, intending to lead him. But the horse bolted, Elizabeth got disorientated, then lost and then exhausted. She sat down under a hedge to rest - and got buried by the snow. Meanwhile the horse came home alone and her husband set out to search for her. There was no trace. They searched the next day and the day after that. They thought she must have been stolen by gypsies and would never be seen again - unless when the snow melted her body would be found murdered in a ditch.

"But then a shepherd noticed a handkerchief sticking out of a snowdrift - and heard Mrs Woodcock shouting at him. He dashed off and came back with men and shovels, together they dug her out. She had been trapped under snow all that while, but was still sensible. They carried her home - and they sent for me.

"I noticed she was cold & so directed she be put to bed without delay & take small quantities of weak broth - not so frequently as to overload her stomach - and not have any strong drink nor be brought near any fire. But she had many visitors taking her spirits and nourishing broths in greater quantities that I directed and seemed to have feverish symptoms - her pulse was rising, face flushed & breathing shorter than ought to be - it was feared she would have survived in the snow, only to die because she would not do what I told her".

58

Dr Thomas Okes became agitated as he thought back nearly 40 years to what might have been his greatest triumph.

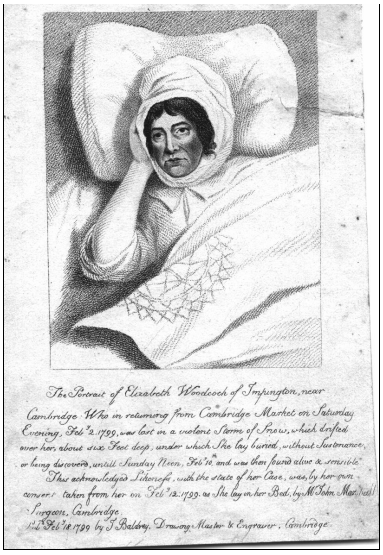
"It was a marvellous tale, Mr Pickwick. First thing I did was to put an advertisment in the Cambridge Chronicle saying how I would be publishing an account of Mrs Woodcock's survival after a week buried in snow. Of course it would not benefit me ... not like those people who brought out prints and sketches, poems and rhymes, all cashing in on the poor woman. I made it clear any profits would go to the family"

So why, Pickwick pondered, was the good Doctor reprinting his pamphlet in 1838.

"Elizabeth Woodcock herself was about 42 years, she'd had several children by first husband and one by second - it was 2 1/2 years old and she was still suckling it at time she was lost - do you know her milk dried up after being buried. Mind you she had not passed water nor made stools whilst in her snow cave - had she done so I believe she would have died.

"I noticed her feet in state of complete mortification - they had been frostbitten before being covered with snow - so ordered they be wrapped up in linen cloths wetted with brandy. Her lips and tongue had suffered much. I gave medicines to keep off fever & in the evening prescribed some opium to keep her quiet

"On the Tuesday more people poured in and were exciting her - the fever got worse, her face and neck turned a deep red colour, and she complained of excessive pain in head and body. She got no
sleep and could take no nourishment. I directed a clyster of mutton broth to be administered immediately, some saline mixture with antimonial wine & dose of opium at night and some strong
decoction of bark as soon as the enema had operated. Next day the broth had produced a large evacuation of hardened faeces, the pain eased immediately & the fever went off



"On the Thursday she was extremely weak and low, I could hardly hear her voice - and still people came. I persuaded her to drink some port wine and the bark agreed with her but the opium had best
effects. I ordered more mutton and that her feet be wrapped in warm cataplasms of stale beer and oatmeat - but the pain continued

"By Friday she could not move in bed without two people to help her - one moving her body, the other the feet which were very heavy and unwieldy. She had no evacuation and had made no water
for 48 hours - so gave her more port wine and another clyster

"By Friday evening the clysters had produced three evacuations which made her very low - only with difficulty could I stop her fainting on bed - so I gave some sago with wine and a few spoonfuls of cordial mixture with usual does of opium. She seemed to rally - but the stench that came from the bed was awful

59

By now Pickwick was tiring, but Dr Okes' detailed medical explanation of his treatment of Elizabeth Woodcock following her entombment in the snow was too interesting to forgo - not that he could have stopped him anyway. Pickwick also noticed that others in the bar had drifted away, this was obviously a tale that had been told before

"You see her feet were becoming mortified and the smell of them became extremely offensive though nurses by changing the poultices thrice a day lessened it as much as possible. Mrs Woodcock complained of inward cold and hot wine, rum and water and extra blankets could not remove it, so I raised the opium to two grains thrice a day. By Saturday she was a bit better but by Sunday the mortified parts of her feet were extremely offensive - by now she was taking one and a half grains of opium 3-4 times a day

"On Monday her feet were worse and on Tuesday & Wednesday she was seized with violent diarrhea - so I upped the opium to 2 grains every 3 or 4 hours. By Friday several of her toes were so loose I easily removed them with the scissors and within a few days I removed them all - except one of the great toes. But the rest of the flesh on her feet had wasted away and peeled of

"Mind you otherwise she continued to gain strength and her bowels were in good state; although she had not much relish for meat she took strong broth in large quantities and milk porridge and drank some wine and ale. But she could not sit in the chair as her feet became exceeding painful and at end

March I took off the remaining toe. But then she was seized with unusual sleepiness, slept almost costantly for three or four days

"By April 17th her general health had much improved, but though it was true that her life was saved the mutilated state in which she was left, without even a chance of being able to attend to the duties of her family was almost worse than death itself. Still the people came to see her, still they brought her hard liquor, and still Mrs Woodcock enjoyed it.

"She died on July 24th 1799 but she will never be forgotten. I have reissued my little pamphlet a time or two and as you can see I now certainly know as much about the foot as many another doctor. I can amputate toes with the best of them and I have my scissors here in my pocket. Just take off your sock sir and let me have a little look ..."

Pickwick did not relish being prodded and pulled about by Dr Okes. But he had no option. By the time he was carried up to bed his foot had been examined, measured, commented on, talked about by all in the bar - happy to return now the tale had finished - and wrapped up tight in some foul-smelling bandage. It would be a day or two before he could walk upon it. But at least he had avoided Dr Okes favoured opium pills or the dreaded mutton clyster!_

60

By the morning Pickwick's throbbing ankle had healed somewhat, but it was obvious he would need another day at least before he was again to be even moderately mobile. Meanwhile he had the bathchair, not too uncomfortable a means of conveyance, but he would need somebody to push.

As he pondered over a leisurely breakfast, his eyes straying to the bustling street outside and Emmanuel college opposite he could not help overhearing an animated conversation coming from one of the darker corners of the inn. Peering into the gloom he spotted a black-browed man and a black-faced boy whose young face was streaked white with tears.

"What good are you - you urchin. No matter what we feed you you will keep a-growing. You'll be no use to me if you carry on at this rate. I'll send yer back to the workhouse where I found you. If I have to take the seat out just because you're too fat that'll be a severe inconvenience to me ..."

Pickwick summoned the innkeeper, John Page, to find out what was going on. He found him reluctant to discuss the matter - there were some things that were not the concern of guests, like himself. He did not ought to pry such things. Nevertheless Pickwick's interest was now stimulated, and once he got his teeth into a subject he was reluctant to let go. He persuaded Page to ask the gentleman to join him.

Soon he found himself shaking hands with one who on closer acquaintance was even dirtier than he had at first perceived. His boots were black, his trousers black, his whole being black as soot. And soot - and worse - was his trade

"Chumley's the name, chimneys my game, sir. You got a problem, I've got the solution, at least I used to have before that urchin of mine grew so big. Oh he's a good climbing boy and the rate he's growing he'll be all right for a year or two yet. It takes quite a while to train them up. I tell them there's some plum pudding and honey at the top of the chimney - and I give them a little encouragement with my brush if they won't go up straight away.

"Trouble is they talk to other chimney boys and they start worrying about diseases from the soot - they get a sort of cancer - but it is not altogether fatal, unless they will not submit to the operation - and without the operation it is death, and they're scared of the operation. But there's problems in every occupation I say.

"Sometimes the chimneys are so narrow they have to climb with their arms straight out ahead of them and then when they come down their shirt's get rumpled up and they get stuck. That can be a blessed nuisance. Sometimes we even have to cut them out, and that can take two hours of more. Its almost as troublesome as waiting outside some country mansion at 4 o'clock in the morning for some dozy servant to wake up and let you in so you can get done before the family wake up. But that's not the worst of it."

61

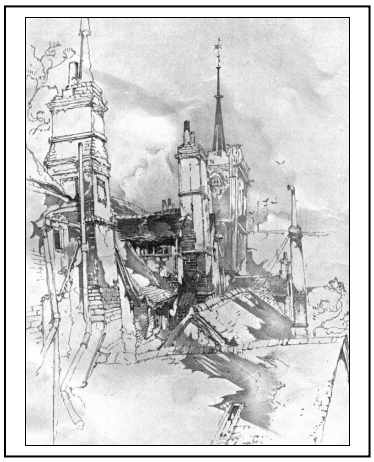
Pickwick listened, horrified to the chimney-sweeper's lament.

"You seem to me as if you have experienced graceful living. You imagine that you have invited a large party to dine - a grand display is to be made - and about an hour before dinner the maid comes running up to say the kitchen chimney is on fire. What do you do - you come running to me - guests cannot be disappointed, you have your hospitality to account for. So out come I - and the lad. Well there really is nothing for it - up he must go to put it out."

"But surely", Pickwick interjected, "there is a positive prohibition of such practice in one of the Acts of Parliament".

"That may be sir, but what matter Acts of Parliament when the pleasure of genteel people - even Members of Parliament - are concerned - what is a toasted child compared to the agonies of the mistress of the house. And besides they'll pay well, five shillings or more.

"You see the fire is only at the bottom of the chimney and up nearer the top where the soot's alight. The lad'll go up quick to stop himself being singed and with any luck he'll find the blaze further up can be dealt with all right. Of course you must expect to get a little burnt in a job like this - why Tom there's been up more than 40 chimneys where he's been burnt - he shows the scars off to the other lads.



"Sometimes they'll get halfway up and then yell down that it's so hot they can't go no further. I'm a caring man sir - I say you stay there and I'll sort things out. Then I have to go out - sometimes in the very coldest weather - and climb right to the top of the roof - at my age. And I can tell you it is hard work climbing ladders and carrying a heavy bucket of water. I pour the water down the chimney - that helps put the fire out - though it can wash the lad out as well. Leastways it cools him off|

"No, that's not what the trouble is today. Well nobody wants chimneys swept during the hot Summer months. Are you sure you want to know ..." Pickwick was not sure, but he had heard so much, there could surely be nothing worse.

"Well, its not chimneys at all. Its privvies. People are always dropping things down them - watches and rings and things - and that's what's happened here. But Tom here's growed too big. You see we tie a piece of rope around his middle and let him down through the hole - where the people sit. But he can't get through any more. If that means a carpentry job to take the seat out every time it'll mean I have to put my charges up or get a smaller lad."

No wonder the boy was upset. Pickwick had an idea. After a few minutes further conversation he rented the boy for the day, not to climb chimneys nor descend privvies, but to push his bath chair around the streets of Cambridge.

62

The chimney sweep's boy could not believe his luck as he was told that today he was to be free to walk in the fresh sunlit air of Cambridge rather than merely to glimpse a patch of blue sky at the end of some difficult climb.

To have a day off was a wonderful experience - but to have two days off in as many months was truly marvellous. Almost before he knew it Pickwick's bathchair was made ready and he was outside the Castle Inn and wondering which way to turn. Tom had no doubt.

Turning to his right he trundled Pickwick past the newly-opened University Arms Hotel to the immense green swade of Parker's Piece - a rough unkempt area the grass now flattened by thousands of feet and marked with what seemed to be an immense circle made up of spokes but with no rim

Fluttering limply against a post was a notice and it was to this that the chair was wheeled. "Read this to me again, Mister" begged the lad - and Pickwick obeyed

"Cambridge Coronation Festival. Rustic sports, in celebration of the Coronation of her Most Gracious Majesty Queen Victoria on Midsummer Green on Thursday the 28th day of June, 1838" - less than a month before

"The committee appointed for conducting the Rustic sports ..." But he got no further. Tom was bubbling over with excitement.

DIEU ET MON DROIT

CAMBRIDGE
CORONATION
FESTIVAL.

Rustic Sports,

In Celebration of the CORONATION of her Most Gracious Majesty QUEEN VICTORIA,
On THURSDAY the 28th day of JUNE, 1838.

The Committee appointed for conducting the RUSTIC SPORTS on the approaching Festival announce to the Public, that the following Amusements will commence precisely at Four o'clock in the afternoon,

ON MIDSUMMER GREEN.

THE
NEWMARKET BAULK
OR, HOW TO RISE IN LIFE!

Well-Soaped Scaffold Poles, stuck up indifferently out of the perpendicular—will be climed for, by youthful and unsophisticated Cantabs, for Breeches, Legs of Mutton, &c. &c. If any competitor obtains an elevation two yards higher than the top of the pole—it is no go!

Jumping in Sacks.

A distance of 20 yards by Six Men. Each man to jump in a 4-bushel Sack (to be provided by himself for the occasion.) The winner to receive a New Pair of Boots.—Second best, a New Hat, warranted to fit.—The Third, a Pair of Shoes.

BISCUIT BOLTING.

Twelve Boys to eat a Pennyworth of Biscuits each. The First shall have a Victoria Waistcoat. Second a New White Beaver Tile. Third, a regular out-and-out Wide-awake.

"That were a day I shall never forget. You see they had a big tea here on Parker's Piece - but I never went to that, they say they had space for 15,000 people but not me. I did try and go to watch but there were so many people before me - thousands of them and I'm only little

"But I did get to these sports - and I won something. You guess which I won"

Pickwick looked down the list of events. Jumping in sacks - that might be suitable for a chimney-sweep boy, but it was only open to six men who had to provide their own sacks with a new pair of boots for the victor and a new hat to the runner-up

Young lads 100 yards race. The winner to receive a pound of the best Souchongacatamaranchoochoorigdumfefefumrumpecoemirabilis-flavoured Gunpowder Tea and pair of shoes - "That's what I wanted - the gunpowder - I would have put it up the next chimney they made me climb - that would have learnt them"

Biscuit bolting - twelve boys to eat a pennyworth of biscuits each - the winner to have a Victoria Waistcoat, the second a new white beaver tile, the third a regular out-and-out wideawake. "I wanted to go in for that but old Chumley wouldn't let me - said I'd get too fat. There's one there that he would have won, no trouble at all - down there near the end"

63

Urged on by Tom, the chimney sweep boy, Pickwick continued to read the programme of sports which had been held on Midsummer Common to celebrate Victoria's Coronation. He could see at a glance which the lad meant to refer to his master.

whose mouth is more than twelve inches wide—or who can drink a bucket of water at one draught! No one need apply

ROYAL PIG RACES.

By 10 Men. The tail to be soaped. The First Man who twice catches it by the tail, and fairly suspends it over his shoulder, to receive the Pig as a Prize.

An Elegant Pie-bald Short-legged Well-fed Curley-tailed PIG,

To be run for and caught in same manner as first Pig, for the same prize.—Also, 2 other Royal Pig Races—on same terms.

GRINNING MATCH.

OR, WHICH IS THE UGLIEST PHIZ!!

This Match will be contested by Men of all ages, and all complexions—all description of physiognomy—and every degree of ugliness and beauty—whether short or tall, little or big, lean or fat, young or old, green or grey—and must be performed according to the usual customs on these occasions, exhibiting, in Grimaldian excellence *and bold relief*, the various Contortions of the "Human Face divine," by peeping through a Pegasian Cravat—or, as the vulgar would profanely designate it—a Horse's Collar! The party who shall be declared the winner will be rewarded with a bran new pair of Velveteen Trousers, and a New Wipe. The other competitors will be rewarded with a gallon of Sam Moore's regular right-sort, Head-strong, Out-and-out, Strong-bodied, Ram-jam, Come-it-strong, Lift-me-up, Knock-me down, How d'ye-like-it, Ge-nu-ine Midsummer-Green Stingo! and a New Hat each.

A RAM RACE.

To be Run for—A Gigantic RAM, of stature and speed remarkable—Positively descended from the Great Derby Ram

ROOTING EXTRAORDINARY,

By Boys in a Tub of Meal, for Sixpences.

"Grinning match, or which is the Ugliest Phiz! This match will be contested by men of all ages, and all complexions - all descriptions of physiognomy - and every degree of ugliness" - "that's him all right" - "or beauty - whether short or tall, little or big, lean or fat, young or old, green or grey - and must be performed exhibiting the various contortions of the "Human Face Divine" by peeping through a Pegasian Cravat - or, as the vulgar would profanely describe it - a Horse's Collar! All competitors will be rewarded with a gallon of Sam Moore's regular right-sort, head-strong, out-and-out, strong-bodied, ram-jam, come-it-strong, lift-me-up, knock-me-down, ge-nu-ine Midsummer-Green Stingo"

But which would Tom have won - the blindfolded wheelbarrow race - surely one used to a life of sooty darkness would have had an advantage, bobbing for oranges - or would it be the Newmarket baulk

"That's the one I won - leastwise I say I won it, only they never gave me any of the prizes, not the leg of mutton, not the breeches - nothing. You see these sports were really a disaster. Well the jingling match was spoiled because they didn't keep the crowd back, the donkey races would have been alright, except they forgot to stake out a course and as for the Newmarket baulk ... You see they stuck some poles up from the ground, all different angles and what you had to do was to climb up them. Well me being a chimney sweep boy I know all about climbing. To make it interesting they put soap on the poles so that you'd slip back down again - only they put too much soap on that they were just like ice - nobody could get even half way up. I got the furthest, I know I did - you just had to look at the pole. No matter that I'd washed as best I could I couldn't help leaving a sooty mark and you could see that was higher than anybody else. That weren't fair. You'd think somebody could do something as simple as that and get it right. Cambridge council couldn't organise anything!"

ON MIDSUMMER GREEN.

THE

NEWMARKET BAULK

OR, HOW TO RISE IN LIFE!

Well-Soaped Scaffold Poles, stuck up indifferently out of the perpendicular—will be climed for, by youthful and unsophisticated Cantabs, for Breeches, Legs of Mutton, &c. &c. If any competitor obtains an elevation two yards higher than the top of the pole—it is no go!

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At this junction there was an almighty roar of indignation from a gentleman who hearing the tenure of the conversation had paused to hear the lad's account of the Coronation celebrations.

"Nonsense! Did you not see the fireworks - the coloured fire, the grand gerandole discharging rockets, the Chinese jerbs, the Saxon wheels ... did you not witness the exquisite way that fire spelled out "Long Live the Queen" and drew a likeness of her Majesty - have you ever seen anything better in all your life.

"Have you any idea of the organisation that went into this production - have you any idea of the dozens of prominent citizens who laboured long to produce this spectacle, the like of which will never be seen before - and do you know none of this would have been achieved without me!"

64

Pickwick had been in London on 28th June, 1838, and knew at first hand of the shambles of the new Queen Victoria's coronation - indeed he could have told a tale or two himself, but Thomas Hallack was in no mood to listen.

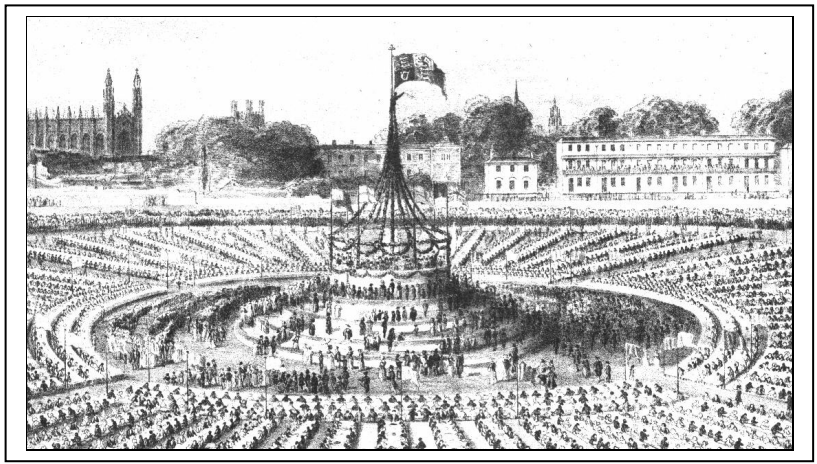
Young Tom, the chimney-sweep boy, disappeared and Pickwick was marooned in his bathchair, at the mercy of his new acquaintance. In the event it was quite an enlightening and interesting tale of how petty jealousy and spiteful squabbles still could not prevent the success of an event which already seemed certain to become part of the folk history of the town.

Hallack explained : "The Mayor - Charles Humfrey the banker - he thought there should be a dinner in the Town Hall - well the councillors are always having dinners there on any excuse - but as this was a special occasion he thought they should invite the women to join in provided they sat in the gallery. But Thomas Nutter thought it should be extended to the whole town and so they called a public meeting and set up a committee to arrange entertainments in the various parishes. I was chosen to represent St Mary the Great parish, in the town centre - well I have a grocery business in Butcher Row.

"Nobody wanted to be Secretary so I said I'd do the job but only on condition at I should publish an account of the proceedings - there was so much work involved as secretary that I considered it my right to publish. I have a copy of my account here somewhere ... if you'd care to buy one"

"Why was it", thought Pickwick, "that everybody and his aunt in Cambridge was determined to issue booklets and endeavour to sell them to anybody they met". But of course he was a captive audience and a copy of Thomas Hallack's account of the Coronation celebrations is to be found amongst the other papers in the recently discovered scrapbook, here in front of me as I write.

"Some people wanted meetings in each parish, but Mr Barker the banker wanted to see the whole festival held on Parker's Piece, like they did back in 1814 for the celebrations at the end of the wars against Napoleon - only that were a fiasco. Not so much the celebrations since 6,000 people were given a beef and plum pudding meal, followed by sports and a bonfire - that went off all right. The problem was of course - as you will remember - that old Boney wasn't beaten in 1814, he escaped from Elba and it wasn't till after the Battle of Waterloo that peace finally came.



"Anyway some felt that it would cost too much, and that there would be disturbances if we brought all the

various classes together in one place. Some of the bigwigs sent letters saying it should be celebrated in parishes and there was a stormy discussion. It went on so late we had to get candles in as it was too dark to see whose hands were up - but in the end the plan for a big celebration was carried by 500 to six.

That didn't please the Conservatives - they held a meeting at the Eagle and deciding to support dining in parishes - odd seeing how nine tenths of them had just voted for Parker's Piece. But then they had another meeting and voted in favour and those who hadn't wanted it scrambled forward to take the credit and get on the committees

65

Thomas Hallack continued to explain the proposals for celebration Queen Victoria's coronation, two months earlier

"At first we though it would be impractical to get everybody on Parker's Piece but Mr Bond - a grocer friend of mine in Bridge Street - drew up a plan to show how it could be done. At first we thought give dinner to 10,000 but soon had 14,000 applications - so had to get more tables, more food. Mr Bond offered to provide and erect tables free of charge if builders and merchants would supply the planks, send the men (who would be paid) & supervise the work

"It was obvious we should have to have committees for various things. I was chairman of the Plum Pudding committee and we had to sort out the making of 1,650 puddings. This meant getting 10 sacks of the best flour, nearly 2,500 pounds of raisins, 3300 eggs, 370 gallons of milk - that came from people in Cottenham and Willingham and when it was all mixed up together it looked like custard filled with plums. Mr Lenton, the cook of Christ's College made them all. They had to be boiled in all sorts of places, the Red Lion & the Bath House pubs, several of the college kitchens, but most were done in Mr Elliston's brewhouse on St Andrew's Hill. That gave them old ladies there something to write notes about I bet| Of course I had a try of the plum puddings - do you know scores of people tasted them before dinner and thousands at dinner - and there was not one complaint, though price only 3d per lb

"Mind you it was those on the Beer Committee who had the best job. They decided that the beer had to be of the best quality and so three of them had the job of going around all the brewers and having a taste. Mind you it was all done fairly. They gave the small brewers in the town the first chance of supplying ale, and the big boys supplied the rest. Wagstaff and Apthorp's supplied 12 barrels each, Eaden and Beales nine each and even Cook from Cambridge Place, Palmer from Market Hill and King of Gloucester place supplied three barrels apiece. There may have been some difference in the taste, but nobody complained. They allowed 3 pints beer per man, one pint women & 1/2 pint for child - not that this was adhered to - every body had as much as they wanted.

"The meat committee got 1000 stone of meat of different kinds - not a single joint was injured, despite the warm weather; it was boiled and roasted in college kitchens by college cooks

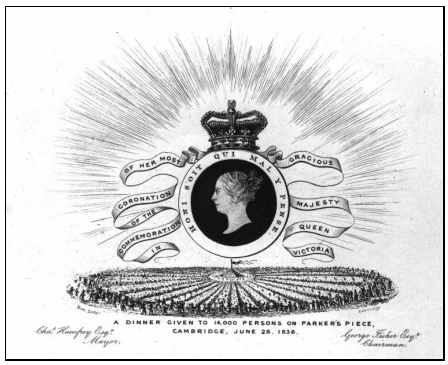
"Mind you they did get too much bread - 4,000 loaves, about half-pound a person and a lot got left over - that was given to the workmen who had the job of taking everything down after the dinner was over. Mr Matthew (another grocer) provided mustard and salt pots for all tables

"I could go on and on", (quite so, thought Pickwick), "but we mustn't forget the ladies. Do you know Mrs Eaden of Market street supplied over 1,700 yards of calico (over half the total)

and her assistants covered 40 tables with it. It made a real pleasant tablecloth - not that the poor people who sat down to eat would have been used to such things"

66

Thomas Hallack plunged his hand into a coat pocket and showed Pickwick a ticket which, two months earlier, would have admitted him to an outdoor feast in commemoration of Queen Victoria's Coronation. But even such small items had caused controversy.



"Of course they needed tickets. Harraden and Roe both produced designs but then was the question of whose name should go on them. Of course Charles Humfrey had to have his name there, seeing as he was mayor, and George Fisher wanted his put on as chairman, but I thought as Secretary mine ought to be there too - and they wouldn't have it

"Mind you that was typical of the Council. As I told you nobody wanted the job of Secretary so I took it on. Then they said that if I were Secretary I should be on all the committees - and they elected an assistant secretary, without asking me. Then they decided they would establish a committee to bring out a book, and put my name down on it, without asking me. I told them, no way I was going to bring out one myself. Then they wanted me to give them the minute book - I said no, I'd written them, I was keeping them - but they could have copies. Let any man who values his dependence beware of becoming a secretary to such an organisations - I have learned my lesson. Once bitten, twice shy"

By now Hallack's indignation at his treatment had caused him to become quite heated and flustered; Pickwick endeavoured to restrain him and, leaving aside the organisational difficulties asked whether it had all worked out well on the day.

Hallack became strangely reticent - he couldn't possibly comment, seeing, of course, as he had been the linchpin of the entire operation, and how it would have all collapsed without him.

But then he spotted an academic figure crossing the edge of Parker's Piece and with some alacrity propelled Pickwick's bathchair in that direction.

Within a few moments Pickwick found himself being introduced to the eminent figure of the Rev Joseph Romilly, Fellow of Trinity College and Registrary of the University of Cambridge

"Ah yes, Coronation day. Do you know I had the honour of meeting her Majesty at St James' Palace in July last year, soon after her accession. I was one of the party who presented the University's address - we had it engraved by Mr Roe of King's Parade, it was bound with a purple ribbon and embossed with a red seal. I was even presented to Her Majesty, and kissed her hand

"So on her Coronation Day I attended the service in Great St Mary's church with my two maiden sisters, Margaret and Lucy. I recollect that the sermon was very interesting as it recited all the important parts of the Coronation. Then we came home and about one o'clock I left my house - over there on the Hills Road - with a carving knife and fork in my pocket - not something we bachelor dons do often you must understand - but I was to preside at table number twentyfour".

67

As the Reverend Joseph Romilly described the activities of Victoria's Coronation day in July 1838 Pickwick felt he could almost have been there

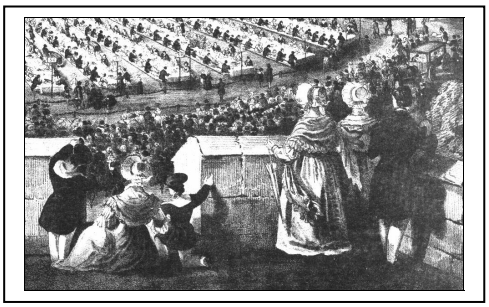
"The scene was one of great activity, literally thousands of people were coming onto Parker's Piece from all directions. The organisers had erected a Rotunda in the centre with rows of seats facing it, where a band played and Kings and Trinity college choirs sang - not that many could hear much once all the eating got underway.

"Radiating out from the centre were rows of tables, like the spokes of a wheel - you can see it clearly marked out on the grass. Do you know 15,000 people partook of the banquet and there must have been 17,000 spectators behind the ropes, kept back by 200 special constables marshalled by Superintendent Titterton

"It had rained the three days previously but now the atmosphere was clear and the heat moderate. When the Mayor, Charles Humfrey, announced that grace before meat was about to be sung there was a flourish of trumpets and all parties at the respective tables arose, and with uncovered heads raised with one accord the universal doxology to the great Giver of all blessings; the words were sung to the tune of the Hundreth Psalm, arranged by Thomas Walmisley, Professor of Music, in the key of A flat, the harmonies being perfectly simple so that all might join in.

"Then it was my turn, as head of my table. Joint after joint of prime meat appeared and disappeared; bread and pickles were supplied in abundance. There was water in casks for the few who requested it - though most enjoyed ale. I believe they were supposed to be rationed to 3 pints for a man, but some of the women on my table were drinking that amount and I am afraid some of the children had somewhat more than their half pint allocation

"And then came the plum-pudding, organised by your companion here, Thomas Hallack. Do you know there has been no plum-pudding like it ever before. They were of admirable quality and smoking hot and they disappeared in a trice.



"All around were thousands of smiling faces and gladdened hearts. I witnessed no jealousies, no bickering; all was harmony and satisfaction. It was a feast of reason, rarely combined with the utmost plenty. All disorder, intemperance and selfishness seemed to have fled the spot as if this grass of Parker's Piece were a hallowed spot.

"After the meal was concluded the whole multitude sang the grace after meat - though of course it was not possible for the whole scattered congregation to be in tune, but after a verse or two things came together and it was most uplifting.

"The cloths were then removed and stewards placed a large supply of pipes, tobacco and snuff which were enjoyed until the band struck up the National Anthem. This would have been most impressive if all had joined in at the same time, but it was sung in parts, which spoiled the effect. Nevertheless it was a day which will live in the memory of all who witnessed it and doubtless for years hereafter. It was a shame however about the balloons"

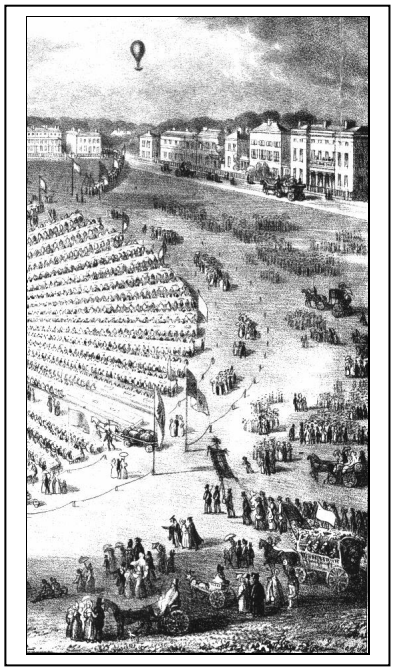
68

At the mention of the word "balloon", Tom the chimney sweep boy, who had made himself scarce when Thomas Hallack roared at him but now returned, turned a deathly shade of pale - quite unlike his normal sooty complexion.

Nor was this lost on the Rev Joseph Romilly who had introduced the topic.

"I've been told that there have been a number of ascents from Cambridge over the years, indeed there was one went up from Trinity Hall - that's the college next door to my own, back in 1785 - though I never saw it. Others have gone up from just across the Parkers Piece there, in Barnwell.

"So it was thought appropriate to mark our new era by launching balloons. The main attraction was Mr Green, the celebrated aeronaut, and his fearless consort. There were delays in getting the apparatus ready but at six thirty they climbed into the basket, the rope was let go and the intrepid pair started on their aerial voyage amid the deafening plaudits of thousands of spectators. They lady turned round and looked down on us quite fearlessly - I confess it would have scared me to be so near the heavens in so slight a contraption, but Mr Green was quite used to it - it was, I believe his 251st ascent.



"Up they soared, the lady waving her handkerchief until she was so high as to be quite invisible. We watched as the wind took it north - but then changed and they headed south-east. Then the wind quite died away and the balloon made but little further progress, finally descending in a field near Fulbourn somewhat over an hour later.

"Several people saw it land and ran out to help, including the Reverend Mr Hall. Mr Ekin from the Hoop Hotel had followed in his gig - not an easy job. He says the balloon actually passed well over Fulbourn but was then blown back by the changing wind. He collected them all up and returned them to Cambridge

It caused quite a stir in all the places along the route - children were running out of their cottages in Chesterton and Cherry Hinton - little villages some way out of Cambridge.

"Many such places organised their own Coronation celebrations - Chesterton arranged a gala, with a parade led by a band and a dinner to nearly one thousand people. The good folk of Balsham entertained a similar number - basing their celebrations on the arrangements here in Cambridge, whilst 700 sat down at Bourn and my friend, the vicar of Barton provided tea, cakes and ale to all the population and organised sports there.

"Of course larger places catered for even more. I learn that at Ely there was a parade of the charity children preceded by a band and some 4,000 of the poor assembled in the Market Place before marching to Palace Green for their celebration meal. There was a slight problem for Weippert's band could not be engaged for the dancing afterwards, but they improvised other music. At least that was better than at Newmarket

69

Rev Joseph Romilly continued his account of the celebrations of Queen Victoria's coronation in the town around Cambridge

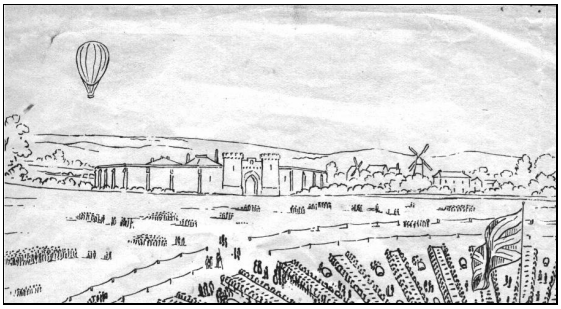
"Do you know even Newmarket shops closed - though not until noon, just before their feast to 1,700 on Mill Hill. Afterwards, I regret to say that the rural sports were not a success - there

were so many people it was absolutely impossible to keep order and they went off very duff. They did try again though the next evening.

"At Godmanchester about 120 people dined in a booth in the yard of the Horse Shoe, and at Burleigh Hill near St Ives a local farmer, Mr Allpress, gave a good substantial dinner to over 100 of his labourers and their families, including liberal supplies of home-brewed ale, which greatly added to the enjoyment and ensured that the country-dances were performed with gusto

"I have heard reports from Huntingdon that things started there with a loud bang from the artillery, but know little further details - and that brings me back to our balloons"

"During the Coronation dinner, here on Parker's Piece, several small balloons were set off which drifted over the tables - one in fact caught fire, fortunately without causing damage. Then Mr Deck set off a large Montgolfier balloon, over 18 feet high, in the regal colours of purple and white. It shot off into the sky and then discharged a firework that exploded with a large report. Then, being lighter, the balloon rose even more rapidly and was carried away with the wind.



"Mr Deck had fixed a label to it, offering a reward for its return and several lads - who did not qualify for the feast (and here Romilly looked at Tom) - set off to follow. It apparently fell some five miles away but whoever it was that found it and brought it safely back decided that they would send it up again from Midsummer Common. They failed and Mr Deck's balloon was destroyed by fire. You will understand that he is not a happy gentleman

"Of course some of the underclass took the opportunity of the festivities for thieving. Robert Layton, a shoemaker, found that when he returned home somebody had stolen his clothes - some of them were later sold to Johnson, the clothier in Sidney Street; and a fifteen year-old pickpocket was send to jail for two weeks, half of it in solitary confinement, for stealing a handkerchief"

Tom's expression was intended to convey that he knew nothing whatsoever about any of this, though Pickwick was not so sure. He resolved to investigate further the background of his young companion

Joseph Romilly however was continuing to praise the organisation which had allowed such a great celebration to proceed so smoothly - a judgement he was well qualified to make, for as University Registrary he was intimately involved in many of its ceremonies. But he could not resist the opportunity to acquaint Pickwick with a celebration some three years earlier, which had been graced by the presence of that most famous of soldiers, the Duke of Wellington himself. Pickwick settled more comfortably in his bathchair, Tom seated himself on the grass and Romilly started.

70

Joseph Romilly started his account with a history lesson.

"The University of Cambridge is - as you know - a very ancient institution, but some will have us believe that the office of Chancellor goes back even further than that - to one

Amphibalus in A.D.289 (but as the word means "doubtful" in Greek, I think we can dismiss his claim). Certainly we can trace the office back to 1246.

"At one time the Chancellor had to reside in Cambridge and was in charge of the day-to-day running of the University with ecclesiastical jurisdiction over its members. But for the last 300 years or so the University has chosen people of a wider public eminence, able to represent our case on the national stage and ensure we retain our ancient privileges and rights. Mind you the job was not without its problems - no less than four of the people who have filled that office have been executed for one reason or another.

"Our previous Chancellor was his Grace, the Duke of Gloucester, but on his death in 1834 the Marquess Camden was chosen to succeed him, and the Duke of Northumberland became High Steward of the University in place of the Earl of Hardwicke, who had also died.

"You can imagine, perhaps, just how much work this involved for myself, the holder of the office of Registrary - it dates back to 1506, though of course I have only held it since 1832. I have to register the names of candidates for examinations and degrees and so on, and have to attend all the formal proceedings to make proper record. Indeed I have in my charge all the ancient University documents, (those the townsfolk did not burn), perhaps you might care to inspect them in my offices near the Senate House - but I digress"

Pickwick tried to envisage where the Senate House was - and then remembered - for it was outside that impressive building on King's Parade that his stagecoach had shed its wheel, depositing him in the dust and killing the baby of his most pleasant young lady travelling companion - whatever had happened to her, he wondered

Romilly was continuing; "I first met the Lord Camden when he presided at the opening of the Pitt Press in 1833 - I thought then what a loud clear voice he had, though sadly his words outran his brain and his speech tailed off rather tamely. And then once we had elected him I was part of the delegation that travelled down to London - all with our finest gowns, and with the Yeomen Bedell and the three Esquire Bedells with their maces - to formally perform the Installation ceremony.

"I am afraid that it was not so well arranged as would have been wished - I felt that the Orator's speech - which was of course delivered in Latin - made the University out to be completely perfect in all regards (and we have one or two blemishes - though not as many as that scoundrel Beverley would have the world to believe). But then it was Gunning who let us down - perhaps you have met him, he's a Christ’s man"

Pickwick remembered him indeed - in fact he still had his cheque in his pocket, what had his friend done to so disgrace the University, and who was Beverley?

71

Sitting on Parker's Piece in his bathchair, and with Tom the chimney sweep boy beside him, Pickwick was waiting to learn just how his friend Henry Gunning had disgraced the University - Joseph Romilly left him in no doubt

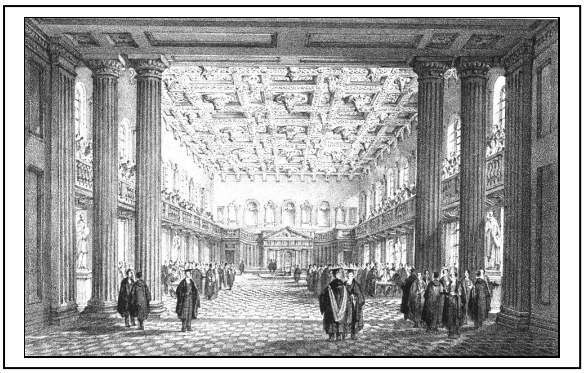
"Just picture the scene, there in Lord Camden's house in London, the most senior members of the University in full academic costume, with the Duke of Northumberland, our new High

Steward there in his scarlet robes, resting on his crutches (poor man suffers from the gout). The Latin oration has been given and we approach the most solemn part of the proceedings, when the Senior Esquire Bedell has to administer the oath to the new Chancellor, the Marquess of Camden.

"Up stepped Gunning to perform the ceremony - and the silly man could not get his glove off! No matter how hard he tugged at it, it would not budge. Can you believe that in such a gathering he even put the oath-board in his mouth so he could have a free hand. In the end the Yeoman Bedell - John Crouch - had to help him!

"And really Gunning's appearance was less than could be desired - his hood was so awfully dirty and the string all tied in knots - for a senior member of the University at such an occasion it was really too bad!

"I was resolved that when we had the honour of receiving our Chancellor here in Cambridge that everything would be organised to perfection - but even I could not foresee the excitement that would be generated.



"The occasion was the first commencement after his installation, when in July 1835 - just three years ago, how time flies - our new chancellor was to preside at the award of various degrees in the Senate House. It was to be a grand occasion and hundreds of people flocked into the town in order to witness the proceedings. That we were able to find lodgings for them all shows just how much the colleges have expanded recently.

"It was one of my duties to issue tickets for those seeking admission to watch the ceremonies in the Senate House. Day after day my office was besieged, my table was surrounded by importunate people pushing forward impatiently. I was working till 11 o'clock at night and sometimes had no time for more than a mouthful of breakfast. The Senate House will hold some 2,000 people - but I had soon distributed several hundred more ticket than that for every day - and then there were all the other arrangements

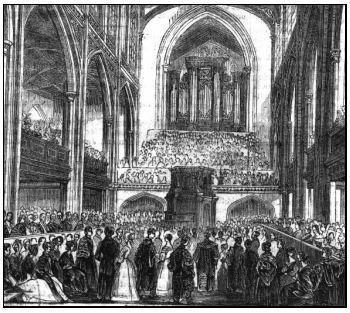
"It was late on the Saturday evening that our new Chancellor, the Marquess Camden arrived at Trinity College in a carriage and four, and took up his abode in the lodge. But he arrived earlier than expected so there were few there to meet him; the first some knew of his presence was when the artillery salute was fired from the top of the Pitt Press & bells of St Mar the Great were set ringing

"Soon the Duke of Northumberland - our new High Steward - arrived (still troubled by his gout) with the Vice chancellor and Esquire Bedells with their silver maces - they walk in procession before the Chancellor at official occasions. Then quite late in the day, we were ready for a magnificent dinner - whilst other people were going to the Breakfast"

72

Joseph Romilly, Registrary of Cambridge University recalled how having dined in some state with the new Chancellor he had needed to return to his office to prepare yet more tickets for the ceremonies ahead. As he made his way home around midnight he could hear quite

distinctly the sound of dance music from the grounds of Downing College where several bands were entertaining a most sparkling assembly



Sunday morning arrived in heavy rain drenching the congregation at Great St Mary's church awaiting the arrival of the new Chancellor accompanied by Prince George, several Marquises, Earls and Viscounts, a batch of Bishops and even the Archbishop of Canterbury. Then came the sermon - "a very bad one, as I recollect, by that fool Dr Fysh Foord Bowes who praised Lord Camden ad infinitum. The whole affair was insufferably long, particularly as we were standing and the weather turned very hot - and people kept pestering me for tickets for the Senate House! In the event I slipped outside half-way through and came back for the end. The church is used for University sermons and a gallery has been installed for the use of Heads of the Colleges and senior academics, but I am afraid the undergraduates have dubbed it "Golgotha" - the place of skulls, quite clever really

"No sooner had the service finally ground to an end that there was a stampede from the church, across King's Parade to hear the Anthem sung in the Chapel. It was utter confusion - people thrusting and squeezing to gain admission, even those who had tickets. You will recollect just how much of my own time had been devoted to these most important items - and now that beast Peter Hinde would not give me one! It was only through the kindness of another Fellow of King's that I could get in. It was a magnificent spectacle, the uniforms, the academic robes and above all the choir singing a Mozart mass"

Pickwick had to confess that he had not yet had an opportunity even to enter King's college chapel - it was something he must remedy at the earliest opportunity, though not in the company of a chimney sweep boy

Romilly continued "I went back to writing tickets for the degree presentation but the main University party dined at Trinity college and then walked about the town, a promenade which is never failing source of attraction and although much rain had fallen and the ground was consequently very damp the area packed with people - though I fear several young ladies found their fine gowns much soiled. The Chancellor and his entourage proceeded along Trinity street to Kings college and paraded the ground for few minutes only, for the dampness arising from rain made it not prudent to remain long outdoors

"But of course not even a cloudburst would have been able to dampen the spirits of the people awaiting the events of the Monday morning. And of course if it did rain why people could keep themselves dry in the footwear he has made famous. It is all too seldom that Cambridge has the opportunity to welcome a famous military hero - why I suspect even young Tom will have heard of his exploits at the battle of Waterloo"

73

"It was on Monday 6th July 1835", reminisced Joseph Romilly, that the Duke Wellington was scheduled to arrive in Cambridge, having spent the previous night at Bourn Hall. I myself never saw the activity at Trumpington - there was such a crush at my office still queuing for tickets for the next day's ceremony ..."

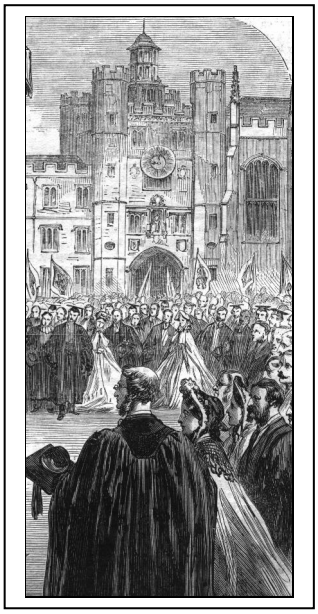
"Ah, but I saw him", broke in Tom, the chimney sweep boy. "me and old Crumley was out at Trumpington, had to do some work at Anstey Hall - and the place was never so crowded. There was over 500 well mounted people there to welcome him - including many gentlemen farmers and yeomen. There were so many

carriages, gigs and vehicles of various kinds that I never saw before with horsemen and their steeds decorated with bunches of laurel. Of course all the village people turned out too.

"No one sure which way he would come from Bourn so people spread out to watch all different directions - but I saw him first - from the top of the chimney! He was in an open carriage and four accompanied by Earl and Countess De La Warr. You should have heard the farmers cheering at the top of their voices and waving those laurel boughs. They had a number of horsemen and carriages to escorted him - but people were so anxious to see the Duke they broke through lines. One horse was thrown down and a carriage upset - that were a right going-on

"You'd have thought that for such an occasion even Chumley would have been excited - but he wasn't, miserable old ... complained how it all clogged up the roads and stopped us getting back into Cambridge"

Romilly took up the account: "When the Duke arrived near Addenbrooke's hospital the crowd was so great that even such a hero was unable to defend himself; the people insisted on taking the very horse from his coach and they towed him into Cambridge in triumph



"There was a general decoration - flags were flying from many houses and every door and window from basement to roof was thronged with spectators - gentlemen waved their hats, ladies their handkerchiefs, all shouting and smiling with all their might. They say even Dr Barnes, the venerable master of Peterhouse whose infirmities rendered him unable to take an active part in the proceedings turned out - in that very bathchair in which you're sitting.

"Even in my office I could hear the sound of the artillery salute and the cheering of the crowds - they say that a band led the procession in but the crowd was so noisy nobody could her it

"When they arrived at Trinity college they laid boards along the steps and dragged the carriage right to the door of the Master's Lodge, where he was to stay. Do you know the Master - Christopher Wordsworth, brother of William the poet. Anyway by now most of the honoured guests were assembled - though it was unfortunate that the odious Duke of Cumberland should have taken it upon himself to arrive despite the best efforts of both the Duke of Wellington and the new Chancellor who had tried to prevent him - so we had to find a room for him too!"

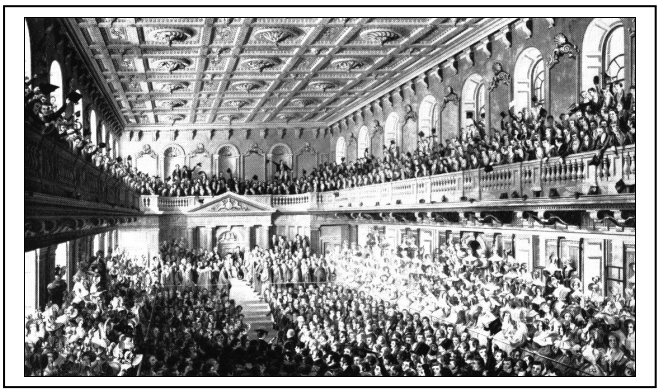
74

If Pickwick had been impressed at the amount of organisation necessary for Queen Victoria's Coronation dinner on Parker's Piece he could not help being overwhelmed with the amount of detail that his companion, University Registrary Joseph Romilly, had had to contend with in preparation for one of the University's most important ceremonies, the conferment of Honorary Degrees by a new Chancellor in June 1835

But by now the sheer recitation of the numbers of tickets issued for the event, the way additional seating had been installed in the Senate House - and how three windows had been taken out to make additional entrances, combined with the warmth of an August mid-morning was beginning to dull Pickwick's senses. Indeed he would have found himself dozing off had not their party been joined by a young man of obviously noble bearing who, with due deference to Romilly, introduced himself as Henry Gonville.

Gonville himself had been in the Senate House that Monday morning and whereas Romilly was seeking to impress with his organisational abilities Gonville had seen things differently.

"Why it was chaos, sir - I could tell you of my divers scramblings and summersets and gyrings and circumflexions before I found myself (to the Gods be the thanks!) alive in the gallery of the Senate House. I could have mused for a considerable time on the high wrought workmanship and skill of the architect who had devised and completed the building, had not my eyes been attracted to the brilliant rows of nodding plumes and flowers, and all the gaiety of gear that bedecked many a high dame and peeping damsel beneath



"After much delay the tidings of the arrival of the procession from Trinity College fixed all eyes to the portals for the music played and the drums were struck, and the people shouted, and another piercing and thundering volley of shot was let fly, the echo and report whereof sounded admirably to the great solace and comfort of all present.

Thereupon the pageant entered, and all uprose and stood to salute the Chancellor, who was preceded by Bedells and Proctors, and arrayed in a dark blue silk robe, most gorgeously embroidered with deep bars of gold lace, and flowing in long and tortuous folds so as verily almost to conceal outright the train bearer and he wore a black velvet cap, with a heavy gold tassel depending therefrom

"Then followed the Vice-chancellor, Prince Pozzo di Borgo, the Archbishop of Canterbury and a mighty store of nobility and gentry and officers of the army, richly appointed, whose varied costume most goodly to behold made a vastly pleasant and exciting spectacle. But all eyes were of course focussed not on them but on the two Dukes who formed part of the procession. The Duke of Grafton and - of course - the Duke of Wellington himself.

"When the Chancellor was installed upon the throne with Prince George on his right and the Duke of Cumberland ("odious creature" hissed Romilly) why, sir, the roof echoed again and again to the lusty cheering our us scholars and I felt truly that the scene was worthy of the older and most stirring times of our Ancestry"

And then the ceremony started.

75

Once all had assembled in the University Senate House on 6th June 1835 the formal business of the conferment of degrees could take place - and Romilly took up the account

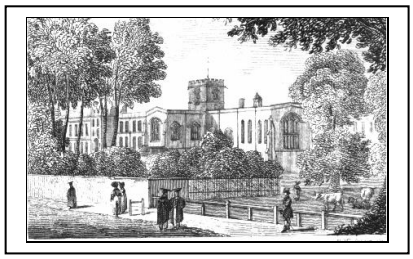
"The Orator presented Pozzo di Borgo - the Russian ambassador - first, then the Archibishop of Canterbury, then the Duke of Grafton - and each person was then led by Gunning, the Senior Esquire Bedell, up the steps of the Chancellor's platform - and fortunately Gunning seemed to be wearing his clean apparel this timel

"Then came the moment everybody had been waiting for, the conferment of a degree on Arthur Wellesley, Duke of Wellington. There was such a round of applause and reiterated shouts which seemed absolutely interminable; the effect was certainly very fine and it worked so much upon one's feelings that it produced a choking sensation in my own throat - as it did in every other"

"Oh yes", interjected Henry Gonville, "his very name caused such a surplusage of mirth and admiration why I could not recount even half the rejoicings expressed. Yet his Grace in the meantime did stand as unflinched and unmoved as his statue in the Hyde Park"

"The orator's speech", continued Romilly - "in Latin of course, was much admired, especially the part about mingling civic duty with the Military Laurels". "Ah yes", added Gonville, "but it was my own shout which attracted most applause - 'three cheers for Doctor Wellingtonl' and when his Grace appeared in his Doctor's scarlet robes there was yet further mirth and applause, all of which his Grace accepted with much courtesy and constancy

"Everything else was an anticlimax, the rest of the proceedings passed off - but at extreme length and exceedingly wearisome - & soon the exhaustion and fatigue consequent on sitting or standing so long in a crowded room sent away a great portion of the audience, leaving few to cheer at the end; I myself became weary and faint and so took my leave"



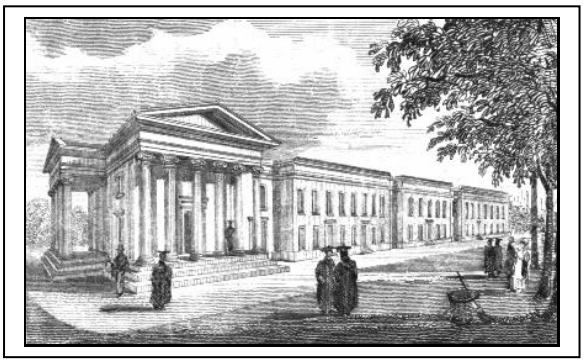
"I, of course, had to stay till the end", added Romilly, "and in the evening there was a dinner at Jesus college in a marquee high enough to take chandeliers - but inclement weather forced them to divert into hall - which was thus very crowded and uncomfortable.

"The company broke up at ten and proceeded to a concert in the Senate House. The building was already crowded in every part to hear the vocal wonder, Grisi, sing. In fact when Duke of Wellington and Duke of Cumberland arrived - half way through the performance - there was considerable difficulty in finding them a place to sit, others came to the doors but seeing it so full went away again"

If things had been chaotic on Monday then an additional conferment next day proved more so. Once more the Senate House was packed - though not quite such a dazzling array of ladies. The recipients of degrees were either cheered or booed by the onlookers except the two Cambridge MPs Pryme and Spring Rice who were groaned at. As the ceremony continued so the building got more crowded and many gentlemen fainted from the pressure - so much for all Romilly's careful allocation of tickets, thought Pickwick

76

Once the formal duties in the Senate House had been completed and the new Chancellor well installed in that July of 1835 there was yet more activity, as Registrary Joseph Romilly related



That evening all the nobility and gentry in Cambridge had assembled at Trinity college for dinner; there were more concerts, more visits. "On Wednesday" added Henry Gonville, "I attended a well-spiced gala in the grounds of Downing college wherein dallied the young and the fair of both sexes, under the supervision of a copious profusion of lynx-eyed matrons and rustling duennas, while the less sentimental male elders, whose billing and cooing rather savoured of turtle fish than turtle doves, resorted in great numbers to the New Court of St John's college"

Pickwick noted how a marquee had been erected lined with strips of pink and white; presenting one of most brilliant and superb sights ever seen - indeed his scrapbook includes an engraving of the event, and by all accounts the food hand been magnificent and Duke Wellington had made a speech

Others resorted to a grand ball given at Town Hall, the profits of which were to go to Addenbrooke's Hospital, informed Henry Gonville. There were 400 tickets available and an extra 300 people were turned away. "The room was decked with festoons of flowers and Weippert's band played with great spirit. The dancing of quadriles, waltzes, and gallopades started at 10 and was kept up until 4 am - a more brilliant assemblage never witnessed in Cambridge; all agreed that every thing went off with great eclat"

And still it continued. Thursday had seen a public breakfast in Trinity cloisters. The space beneath the library set apart for more distinguished guests with fruit and wines, tea and coffee. In the centre of the court a marquee had been pitched for a military band. On the tables were models in confectionery of Pitt press, (recently opened by the new Chancellor), the Observatory and the College Fountain. Additional marquees had been erected for dancing.

Some 2,000 people took part in the banquet enjoying wines of great variety and excellent quality. The grounds were decorated in excellent taste - with a brilliant crown lit up with gas, wreaths and stars - and display of fireworks organised by Mr Deck. But in fact the greatest luminary, the Duke of Wellington had left town.

"I could give you far more detail, Mr Pickwick, you see I keep a diary - have done for years". "You must publish", urged Pickwick, "and not bury it unread in some dusty library - for without such a record people will look back on this coronation affair on Parker's Piece but completely forget your Commencement celebrations just three years earlier, which seem so much grander"

At this Joseph Romilly smiled, commented sadly on the state of his handwriting, which would render the diary illegible to others, and look his leave. But not before extending an invitation to Pickwick to visit him in his rooms at Trinity College

77

Finally alone on Parker's Piece with Tom his young companion Pickwick observed that his young friend wore a puzzled look on his face

"All that what he was telling us - all those parties and food and all those Generals and gentry, does that really happen here in Cambridge"

Tom had of course seen the colleges - had been up the chimneys of various of them - but it bore no relationship to the Cambridge that he knew. A town of back streets, alleys and courts, of overcrowded insanitary hovels and of building work. As they looked towards the windmill, beside the lane that was Mill Road, Pickwick could see evidence of preparations for building everywhere, though as yet there were few completed houses.

He could however discern a large new building bearing the unmistakable aspect of a Workhouse and asked Tom to propel him in that direction.

At this Tom turned pale, stamped his foot and resolutely refused to do as he was told. Pickwick remonstrated with him, the boy shouted back.

Passers by looked their way and everything seemed to be getting out of hand

Intervention came from an unexpected quarter. "Is this old gent bothering you, Tom me lad". The words came from a particularly scruffy villainous individual in a voice so menacing that Pickwick found it was his turn to feel intimidated

Tom immediately cheered up: "Bill Herring, is that you, I thought I'd never see you again - thought they'd have hanged you for sure for what happened to Bob".

“Nah, we all put our stories together, and Legge weren't going to argue, especially seeing as he arranged for the body to be buried without an inquest. Mind you he got frit when they dug it up - and got told off for it by the court"

Now this was something Pickwick was not sure he wanted to hear - but on the other hand it was too interesting a tale to miss. He stammered out how he had paid the chimney sweep to borrow the lad for a day to push his bathchair - a story Tom was happy to corroborate. Then having previously heard of the exploits of the Duke of Wellington in the Senate House Pickwick soon found himself in a tavern called "The Wellington" in a street called "Wellington Row", with a mug of ale dispensed by its landlord, Thomas Badcock.

It was here that the realities of the other side of Cambridge life were made clear to him. As glass of ale followed glass of ale down the throat of William Herring, so Pickwick became acquainted with life in the new Union Workhouse in Mill Road, Cambridge.

78

Sitting in "The Wellington", in the Barnwell area of Cambridge Pickwick learned of life in the new Mill Road Workhouse. Certain characters became clear to him - Thomas Legge was the workhouse master, Harriet his wife was Mistress, Richard Robinson was the schoolmaster - not that he could teach Tom anything apparently - William Barton was a porter there and Dr Cribb the surgeon

It appeared that a farm labourer named Bob - nobody would tell Pickwick his surname, had turned up at the Workhouse one afternoon, saying he was ill and unable to work. He had been sent to Dr Cribb who issued him with a certificate, saying he had yellow jaundice. Harriet Legge had given him a meal of meat and bread and the porter allocated him a bed in the able-bodied men's ward, as there were no other available.

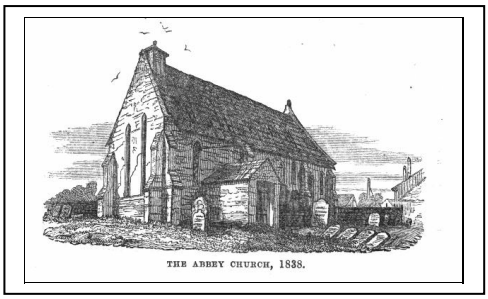
Most inmates went to bed at 8 o'clock, but Bob had turned it earlier - William Herring particularly remembered for he had accepted an extra ration of bread and cheese at 6pm saying he would pass it on, but eaten it himself. After that it appears things got out of hand.

"Well I was woke up in the night by a lot of roaring and shouting - old Bavesty were drunk and ranting and saying how this new chap were in his bed, and this Bob were running up and down the ward shouting 'Halloo, Halloo' and trying to get to the Boys' bed room"

"That's what woke me", said Tom, "I came out and saw all this going on. There was somebody swinging a stick about, trying to keep Bob off his bed" - "Well he tried to get on mine too" Flowers added. "It seemed as if he were drunk, though nobody saw him touch a drop or leave the room. Charlie Bleet and I - with Tom here - we tried to restrain him but that was two o'clock in the morning, everybody were shouting and crashing about and nobody really knowed what happened, but we got Bob on a bed and he was sick and then seemed quieter

"Anyway come morning he'd got this big cut on his head, and there was blood on the beds and on the floor and even on the stairs - we're locked into the wards but can go down stairs"

"Thomas Legge, workhouse master, well he only slept 20 feet away but he didn't hear nothing, leastways he didn't turn out to investigate till morning. Then he had a look at him and sent for Cribb, the workhouse surgeon. But he didn't come for some time and by the time he got there old Bob were ranting and raving and threshing about - well he put him in a strait-jacket. Said how he should have been in the infirmary, but that weren't finished so they left him in the ward


THE ABBEY CHURCH, 1838.

"Well he died and were buried three days later in the churchyard of St Andrew the Less - only there were a letter in the Cambridge Chronicle and the coroner got him disinterred and had a proper inquest. They said how he must have fallen between the beds and caught his head on the iron bedstead - so you see Tom I'm still here to tell you about it!"

79

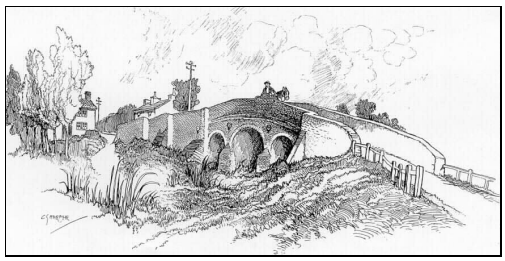
As the subject of disinterment of corpses had arisen for the second time in so many days - Pickwick recalled only too well what the "mad woman" Mary Ann Bones had told him of riots outside the University Anatomy School - he endeavoured to probe the subject a little more.

At first his new companion was reluctant to be drawn but slowly there came a tale of an Irishman called Smith and an Englishman -whom Herring would only identify as "Charles", though quite obviously he knew the surname of the man concerned.

"Well it were like this. Charles took this hamper to the wagon office in Cambridge and asked for it to be sent on to a surgeon in London. He said he'd got it from a cha just down the road, in Barnwell, who'd paid him three-pence just to see it on its way, ,but didn't know what was inside it. Well that were a daft thing to do, cause the clerk got suspicious - apparently that were ponging a bit too.

"Anyway the clerk sent for a constable and when they opened it up they found it contained the body of a woman, about 30 year old. That were the end of Charles - he was thrown in the Town Gaol the one on Parker's Piece - and they soon found the Irishman who held said gave him the package, chap called John Smith.

"When they held the inquest at the Black Bear Inn in Market Street crowds turned out to listen, and they pelted the prisoners and hooted at them when they went in. It turned out this body was that of the wife of an Ely labourer who died quite naturally after being ill for some time and had been buried in the churchyard of St Mary at Ely. Her brother said held seen both Smith and Charles in the churchyard at the time of the funeral - well they of course said they'd been somewhere else at the time (matter of fact I said as how I was with them, well you have to support your mates, don't you)



"But it was the evidence of the turnpike keeper at Stretham bridge what damned them. He said how he remembered them both passing over the bridge and that they had a donkey with them with two baskets over the back – and he particularly recalled them because they disputed the payment of the toll.

"Well the people here got so agitated they had to move the prisoners to Ely and continue the trial there and they were found guilty of stealing not one but three bodies out of the churchyard.

"Their defence lawyer said how they had procured the body for medical science, so no offence had been committed, how could the miracles of healing be performed if dissection is not allowed and the study of death made more useful to the living. "They were sentenced to twelve months had labour, though it was later changed to imprisonment only. That were in 1830, so they're out again now, come in here from time to time if you want to meet them"

80

Pickwick suppressed a shutter at the thought of possibly rubbing shoulders - or shaking hands - with bodysnatchers in the Wellington Tavern in Wellington Row which, as far as he could gather was somewhere between East Road and Sun Street - the road to Newmarket - in the Barnwell area of Cambridge.

Tom the chimney sweep boy seemed to be well at ease here, just a few fields away from the colleges of the town centre. There really was little to link the two communities. Like the New Town he had noticed growing up in the fields south of Downing College it was a separate world and one which strangers, like himself, could penetrate only with trepidation and some personal danger.

But if he could gain the confidence of people like William Herring he could not only find material enough to address a meeting of his own Pickwick Club but possibly encourage young Mr Dickens to help him write a second volume of Papers and so confound his critics who had felt his first effort somewhat trivial.

Thus, once his new companion had returned from 'making room for a bit more beer' Pickwick ventured to discover what "Bill" felt of the new Mill Road workhouse and whether conditions were as bad as people had prophesied

"Well that ain't so bad, I suppose, the food's alright, the rooms are large enough, there's going to be an infirmary - and the schoolmaster didn't teach Tom anything, but Tom knows everything already, not like the Workhouse Guardians - they don't know what they are supposed to do and what they're not.

"Take Christmas. I was in the St Andrew the Great parish workhouse the other year and then the Vicar and Churchwardens made sure we had a proper Christmas dinner - roast beef and plum pudding form the Vicar, beer, tea and muffins from the Churchwardens. But under the new administration in the big Union workhouse that's not allowed. They have to stick to the diet sheet set out by the Poor Law Commissioners - or pay for it out of their own pockets. And nobody can afford all that.

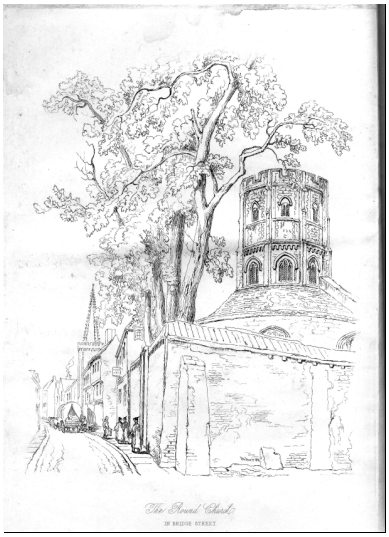
"Mind you I heard that out at Ely they always used to give 2lb beef and a pound of bread to every poor child, as well as blankets dished out from the Bishop's Palace. But now this Tory government has stopped it some of the big farmers - Layton, Cropley, Lawrence and Rayner - have stepped in to take their place. Same applies to other places - dear old Lady Sparrow out at Brampton dishes out several tons of coal and about 100 stones of beef to the poor there and Graffham - they do the same at Godmanchester too

"But - if you want a tip - the best thing is to get yourself into the Town Gaol if you want a good feed. The Mayor always makes sure they get a proper meal at Christmas"

"You workhouse beggars don't know what it means to be poor at Christmas", roared out a voice that Pickwick recognised with dismay. He had no option but to turn and find himself once more n
the company of John Brown, billiard house proprietor

81

It seemed incongruous to be sitting in the dim bar-room of the "Wellington Tavern" on a warm August afternoon and be talking about Christmas, but Pickwick already understood that when John Brown was starting on his tales there was no point in trying to interrupt



"I can tell you one year when my shop was robbed - I were a shoemaker in them days and were making a good go of it, well, say it myself I made the best boots in Cambridge. Only one morning I got to my shop near the Round Church and found the key would not turn in the lock. No wonder - it were already open. They'd took everything, even the boot-trees were gone - but you'd not know anything about that, would you Bill Herring?

"And if that weren't enough the old money-lender who I'd borrowed from pounced down on me, saying how he'd 'heard there was a screw loose and meant to be first in at the death' - seven per cent interest he was charging and couldn't wait a moment for me to get back on my feet. Well I had no alternative. That was Christmas Eve we left our comfortable dwelling and took refuge in an old tumbled-down cottage on the outskirts of Cambridge. Our furniture consisted of half-a-dozen chairs, a table and a stump bedstead.

"That were miserable cold weather, wind howling in the chimney and whistling about the crazy doors and casements. I woke up on Christmas morning and looked down to the foot of the bed and what did I see?. A heap of snow that had been driven in through the casement! The snow had piled up so high against the door that we could not get out from our wretched hovel till some kind-hearted people dug us out"

"Were that the Christmas day of 1836?", asked the chimney-sweep boy. "Cos I remember how the snow was so deep that year that none of the stagecoaches could get through - they were stuck in snowdrifts and took several days longer than they should ..."

But John Brown was not to be distracted so easily. "Within a week I was arrested and conveyed to prison. Here I was compelled to herd with divers loose character - like my Bill Herring here. Some of them were boasting about how they'd cheated their creditors and that made me even more ashamed of the company into which I had thus been unfortunately thrown.

"Desirous to avoid, as much as possible, the contaminating influence of such pests I confined myself within the narrow limits of my cell, an arched kennel, eight feet by six and with just a small window with iron bars placed cross-wise. But I was not to be beaten, not me. A deputation from my Odd Fellows lodge visited and brought me three pounds, twelve shilling and a farthing which they'd collected from members the previous evening. And with that I

bought the necessaries for making boots - started working from my cell. Even the governor and turnkeys gave me orders and six weeks later I was out of gaol.

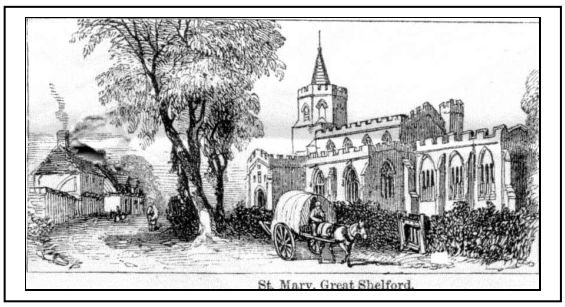
"I still have that farthing - you might ask why it should be that strange amount but you see everything is done in accordance with the title of the Order - the farthing was added to make the amount odd"

82

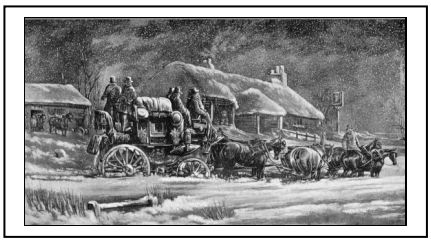
Boastful John Brown stopped short as he realised that he had just confessed himself to be a failure and Pickwick, reluctantly feeling some embarrassment for him, turned the conversation to
Tom's remark about the Christmas of 1836.

At this another of the "Wellington"'s clientele joined in. A giant of a man he stood about six foot four inches high and weighed about twenty-four stone. Pickwick noticed his upright stance, good-natured countenance and ruddy complexion, though whilst he exhibited the proportions of an elephant his manner was docile and good-tempered - and his name was Bird.

It transpired that Bird drove Swann's heavy waggons carrying goods to various parts of the country, though his principal route was the London run to the office in Bishopsgate Street.



He had first hand knowledge of the snow storms of December 1836. Pickwick's notebook records some of the salient facts. Snow, almost unparalleled in living memory and accompanied by a severe wind from the north-nor-east had caused drifts so big as to form impenetrable masses. The roads from London to the north, and indeed to every other place, were completely stopped up. Some of the stagecoaches had managed to get as far as Puckeridge - which Pickwick had himself visited only days before - but there conditions had become impossible. The town had never seen so many stranded passengers, every bed had been taken and upwards of forty people had been compelled to pass the night as comfortably as possible on chairs at the Bell Inn.



Even the Lynn Union coach had found its passage impeded, finally forcing its way into Cambridge on the Tuesday afternoon at four o'clock, instead of the previous day at two. Pickwick could well imagine which Thomas Cross would have had to say about that. Even then the journey had only been possible at all by taking the horses off the coach and driving them through the snow to beat out a track for men to clear. By the time he had reached Barkway the snow had been level with the top of the coach yet in the Wagon and Horses at Barley he had found the pub full of men who should have been clearing snow but who were refusing to work until they were paid. It had taken all Cross's cajoling, bullying and a considerable quantity of ale before the coach was a able to get even as far as the twelfth milestone - and more ale before he could get further.

All this Bird had witnessed for he had endeavoured to follow behind the coach and laboured as hard as any to force the passage through, not so much for the convenience of his masters, but in an effort to reach his home village of Barnwell.

Even so, he contended that had not been as bad as the January of 1814 when the whole country, from Land's End to the Highlands of Scotland had been blanketed in a dreary, deep expanse of white.

Even in the stuffy atmosphere of an August afternoon Pickwick shivered as he thought of it. And yet how the climate had changed - now they were enduring the third year of drought, the ponds were drying up and farmers lamenting that the days of agriculture were doomed

83

"Farmers, don't mention farmers to me!", roared Dick Bird who drove for Swann's. "I travel the length and breadth of the country, and I meet and talk with all the village carriers who take goods to and from the towns, and they all tell me the same thing. The countryside is in chaos - and its all the fault of the farmers.

"You see when we were at war with Napoleon the farmers thought they'd struck a goldmine. With foreign trade blockaded they could sell anything they could grow at whatever price they asked - and there was the policy of 'Speed the plough' to make the most of every scrap of land - you can see the marks in the fields of those shallow, straight, narrow ridges as reminder of days when every sack of corn mattered.

"But with the money they acquired they also acquired a taste for extravagant living, began giving themselves airs and graces and opening up a gap between them and the ordinary folk.

"Why I've seen a modern farmer's wife run away from the sight of her own cows - and if she happened to encounter one of her husband's old sows, with its pigs, I absolutely think she would have gone into hysterics, as would the animal at the sight of her veil and furbelows

"They built themselves posh farmhouses, with bells to call up their servants to light the parlour fire, clean the bright stove, brush the carpets and get Miss Kitty's breakfast and all

"When I've been delivering their latest furniture from London - I see them sit at dinner with their finger glasses and trifle dishes. And while they sat drinking their port why their labourers were drinking water from the ditches.

"But now that the war's over well that's a different story - those that bought up bad land at inflated prices are finding themselves hopelessly insolvent. They go running to their landlords asking for a reduction in their rent - in Waterbeach farmers are paying more rent for their land than they do to all the labourers put together

"I reckon old John Denson's right - have you met him - well he reckons that farmworkers ought to be given an acre of land each that they could work at the end of the day. That would keep them out of the pub, and let them provide enough to live on so they wouldn't be going on parish relief all the while.

"They actually tried that out at Willingham and Waterbeach - the vicar gave 1/2 acre to each labourer, one rood they plant potatoes and other vegetables and the other rood with wheat - they get better crops by spade husbandry than farmer did with his horses and ploughs. You see the plough only skims the surface and the horses tread the bottom as hard as a turnpike road.

"Mind you I blame the Inclosures - that really knocked the heart out of the country folk - no wonder so many of them have coming flocking into Cambridge to find work"

84

No sooner had the word "Inclosure" been uttered in the bar-room of "The Wellington" in Cambridge's backstreet neighbourhood of Barnwell than numerous folk, who Pickwick had taken to be townsfolk joined in to add their comments on the impact it had had on their former village communities.

The Inclosure of parishes was undoubtedly the greatest change the countryside had seen. Agricultural methods and village life had been revolutionised and the practice of a thousand years swept away. The old Open Field system in which men had strips in various fields had been swept away, to be replaced with blocks of land that had to be fenced.

First the major landowners agreed to apply for an Act of Parliament to start the process, but this was not always appreciated by tenants, as Tony Badcock - some relation to the Wellington's landlord - was quick to let him know. "I used to live out at Little Thetford - nice little place halfway between Stretham and Ely - and we muddled along all right till the day the Inclosure men came along. We knew something was in the air, there'd been too much going on what with the Ely solicitors,' Evans and Archer, being seen about.

Anyway that was a Sunday when the solicitor's men arrived in the village, saying how they were going to put a notice on the church door to say how they were applying for an Inclosure Act. We soon told them they weren't going to do any such thing. They argued a bit, but there were about a dozen of us - big boys with bludgeons - so they took the hint and went off

"Of course they no sooner got to Ely than they got ten Special Constables sworn in and came back again with Mr Bacon. the police-officer, to force an entrance. They thought how a batch of Ely Constables would be enough to see off a dozen of us. What they hadn't realised was that we had our spies out and saw them coming back. By the time they got to the church we'd got most of the village out, about 150 men and women - and we'd all got sticks

"You should have seen the shindy. You have to give it to them they were determined to get to that church door and we were decided they shouldn't. In the end they were forced to retreat and they took several bruises and black eyes home with them, I can tell you.

"Well we kept up a watch around the church in case they came back, but they'd had enough. But then the parson came up saying how he was going to hold a service. We told him "No churching today" but he wouldn't listen - nothing we could do would stop him, but we had something to thank God for or so we thought.

"In the end that didn't do no good. The Act went through and then we had years of disruption and meetings"

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"Inclosure meetings - don't you mention meetings" roared another voice - "there were dozens of them, talking about appointing bankers, registering claims, setting out boundaries, staking out roads and ditches - and then sorting out objections and allocating land and objections to

that and on and on ... we were spending more time in the pub talking about Inclosure than we were drinking - well that's where they held the meetings.

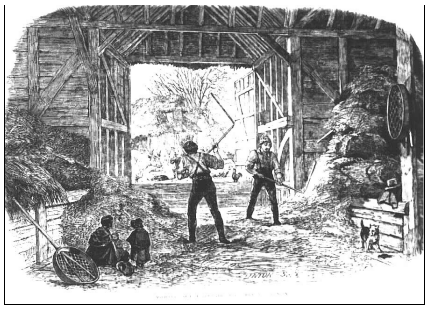
"How were we supposed to know what were going on - it's not as if we can read writing proper, let alone all that legal mumbo-jumbo. That were alright for the solicitors - people like Pemberton, though at least he did seem to be on our side sometimes

"But at the end of the day you can bet one thing - the ordinary man come off worst - we lost our strips of land, we lost our commons, we had nowhere to put our cow, no work to be done to earn enough to live on"

"We had inclosure at Bluntisham back in 1816 and I went back a few weeks ago for the first time since. Well that changed the place completely", another, by the name of Tebbutt, interjected
"Where before there had been great open fields of 200 acres or more, stretching over the horizon as a sea of waving corn or a great fallow of brown earth, without a hedge or fence to be seen, why now it was all small fields ringed with fences or hedges and growing all sorts of crops. The West Fen common that used to be drowned in winter and full of grass in summer has been embanked and drained. They'd even ploughed land in the fen never ploughed before and the Heath, where the sheep from half-a-dozen parishes used to roam was all divided up

"The village itself has changed. Now farmers have got blocks of land out in the fen they're building new farms outside the village - their old farmyards stand empty and covered in weeds

"Those labourers that still have work have to go too far from home to go back for meals; many don't get a hot dinner (apart from Sunday) once in year.



"But there would to be enough work for men, women and children - the seven year olds can earn 2d a day, a woman 7d - except now the farmers have started to bring in those infernal threshing machines which do as much work in three days as would keep a labourer in employment during the winter months

You should have done what we did in Bassingbourn & called in Captain Swing and he would put things right!"

“Who", Pickwick asked, "is Captain Swing?”

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At Pickwick’s mention of the name “Captain Swing” the whole atmosphere in “The Wellington” pub changed.

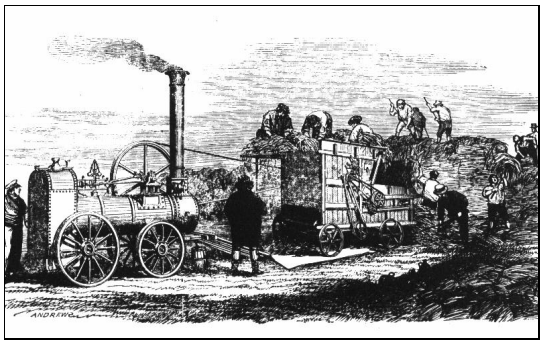
Previously the gathering had been rowdy but good-humoured, a meeting of folk sharing the same problems of eking a living in this newly developing town of Cambridge rather than starving in their rural parishes. They had almost forgotten the odd chap sitting in his bathchair in a corner of the room. But now he was the centre of hostile attention

“And why would a busybody like you be so interested in Captain Swing”, snarled one, whilst others, including the chap who had mentioned that name in connection with Bassingbourn, removed themselves with some speed, leaving ale still in the bottom of his glass.

If ever Pickwick had felt his life threatened before it did so now; none of his previous escapades had prepared him for the suspicion that now engulfed him. Even Tom's face turned pale under its habitual covering of ingrained coal dust

It was Badcock, from Lt Thetford, who rescued the situation, roaring with laughter at Pickwick's discomfiture and convincing all around him that it was the remark not of a police informant but merely of a very ignorant townsman. For surely every countryman knew of Captain Swing, the legendary figure who led the poor farmworkers in their struggle against the tyrant farmers and the machinery that was driving them to destitution. Letters signed in his name had been sent to warn farmers of their fate – indeed John Saville had been committed to Bury gaol accused of spreading them around Huntingdonshire – in fact he had one himself in his pocket that he had picked up a few years earlier

Slowly the suspicions were overcome, though it cost Pickwick somewhat more than he had budgeted for in the way of ale before all were convinced and some time later before he was trusted enough to be told the background of an incident at Croydon, a small village south of Cambridge, six years earlier



"I was servant to Mr James King of Tadlow who hired out threshing machines to farmers round and about. We'd had one out at Thomas Faircloth's farm – behind his barn against the wall of Croydon church.", said William Warren. "It had been there about 4 days and that was about done with, so I went and took it apart. I'd put the spindle in the barn and left the horse part oft machine outside.

"Then I saw about 150 men, women and children coming along - 14 or 15 of them with sledgehammers, pick-axes, saws and hammers. Well old Faircloth goes up to them and they tell him the parish has had a meeting and they'd decided they'd be no threshing machines working there. So I heard him tell them – 'There it is, you break it up – I wish you would, don't go home disappointed'. They didn't need any more prompting so then they started smashing and hitting it for about half an hour. What was I to do – I weren't going to risk by head by butting in an trying to stop it, were I"

"Meanwhile Faircloth was going round writing their names down on a scrap of paper and as soon as they were done he went running of to Earl de la Warr at Arrington. He made out how he'd tried to stop them – told them that would be transportation for them if they broke even one cog. He got his servant, John Spencer, to back him up – but only by promising that if he got one of the men convicted he'd let him have that chap's cottage.

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William Warren continued his account of the threshing machine riot at Croydon in 1832. "Meanwhile farmer Faircloth was going round writing the rioters' names down on a scrap of paper and as soon as they were done he went running of to Earl de la Warr at Arrington. He made out how he'd tried to stop them - told them that would be transportation for them if they broke even one cog. He got his servant, John Spencer, to back him up - but only by promising that if he got one of the men convicted he'd let him have that chap's cottage.

Anyway the jury was convinced. John Green, John Kidman and Anderson Storey were transported for seven years, several of the others of them sent to gaol - men with good reputations. Even the Rector, Mr Hurst, spoke up for some of them and Fitzjohn Casburn said how he'd brought up Simon Titmarsh since he was seven years old - but he was still

imprisoned for six months with hard labour. All 15 of them was send away and that made a big gap in the life of Croydon village, 1 can tell you - really took the heart out of the place. Mind you that were a good deterrent to others who talked about breaking up threshing machines"

"That's all right for you, Bill Warren, you work for the threshing machine contractor. I still say that the machines aren't needed and they ain't safe. I lost my lad in accident with one of them machines more than 20 years ago. He was working for Archer Butterfield at Bassingbourn when the wind blew his coat into the spindle of the machine and that whirled him round and killed him. There were so many accidents in those days that they talked about scrapping them altogether. 1 know you'll say how they have got guards on them, but one death is more than enough"

But it's not just the machinery that's the problem", others chorused. "It's when you get gangs of Irish labourers come into the village and do the harvest for less than local men. You cannot stand for that - why should they be able to steal our harvest, we depend on the money we get them to keep us going through the winter months. Out at Bassingbourn back in 1821 we had a right battle about it - eight of our lads ended up in gaol for turning out with sticks to drive the Irish away". "Do you remember that business at Guilden Morden", another joined in. "How that Irishman stole Joseph Revell's gun out of his house and got away with it 'cos he said the farmworkers had beat him up and took away his sickle and he needed it for protection. I know the Irish have got their problems, but they should be stopped coming into our villages and if the law won't do it, we have to"

But, Pickwick wondered, who could be the judge of what was legitimate protest and what was simply lawlessness prompted by rebellion at changes which, though they might be unpalatable, were essential if the farmers were to continue to earn a living in a changing age.

Besides, enclosure was not wholly negative, for it had resulted in the growth of the very community of Barnwell in which he now found himself

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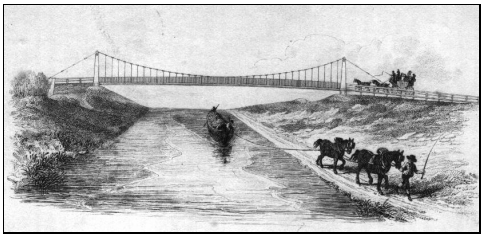
"You'll never get nowhere, you and your Captain Swing, while you just muddle about as individual parishes - you should get organised if you want to really protect yourselves"

All eyes swung round - but Pickwick knew it could only be one person - JohnBrown, billiard-house keeper and know-all

"There should be a proper union of labour otherwise you'll remain in your wretched state for ever. Working people in agriculture produce more than they consume, you should work with the farmers for a proper change in the country. The Cambridgeshire farmers have set up their own Association - and they want to ban the foreign corn and set up public granaries to buy English corn in abundant seasons. Well if you add to that doing away with this free trade and restoring the Navigation Laws to give full employment to British sailors - and stopping the power-looms as well if that's the only way to give assistance to the hand-loom weavers - well you'll be well on the way. The Farmers Association want a Grand National Union of the Producing Classes and they petitioned the Duke of Wellington about it"

"Hope they got on better with that Duke, than you do here in the Wellington pub" shouted somebody from a dingy corner, and Brown wheeled round. "Now if you had read - assuming any of you can read - the 'Magazine of the Society for the Encouragement of Domestic Industry' you'd see what that Fellow of King's College says. 1 suspect that you, being an educated man sir" - and here he turned to Pickwick - "Will be acquainted with James Bemard and his ideals. He has the support of Robert Owen. 1 know that does not sound likely that such a place as King's College should be the home of such a radical plan for the complete reform of the evils of society but such if the fact of it"

Pickwick knew something of Robert Owen, the social reformer, who had proposed establishing self-supporting villages run on socialist lines up in the North of England, but not somebody he would have associated with the affluent side of Cambridge. He was even more surprised when Dick Bird, who drove Swann's wagons, broke into the conversation



"I knew I'd heard that name from somewhere. I had a trip the other week, had to go up way into the fen country - and a right journey it was. Up past Littleport and on to the Suspension Bridge at Welney - now that really is a piece of engineering - opened about 10 year ago. Built by a chap name of Brown - I don't supposed he was a relation of yours" - but before John Brown could respond, he continued

“I was stopped there for a jar when people were going on about this Owen chap and how William Hodson of Brimstone Hill, Upwell was talking about setting up a new town deep in the fen at a place called Manea. Now that's somewhere even I've never gone to, well its miles off the beaten track on the other side of the Old Bedford River. People say how all the inhabitants there have got webbed feet and yellow bellies - but now they're going to set up a new Garden of Eden!"

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At the mention of the name Manea in the bar of the Wellington in the Cambridge backstreets one of the company suddenly awoke from a drunken slumber. "Don't you mock Manea folk - old King Charles wanted to make a new town there after he had drained the fens - only he never did. He was going to call it Charlemont - and there's pile of dirt where he was to have started - what we call Charlie's Mound and if it were good enough for him that should be good enough for you"

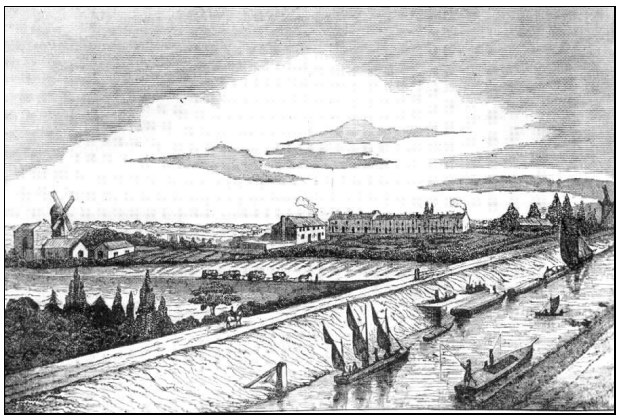
"You might not a got a new town, but you're going to get a new Garden of Eden - if what people say is true", rejoined Swarms' driver, Bird. "There's a chap from Brimstone Hill, Upwell behind it - a fenland farmer called William Hodson".

"I know him - at one time he was a horse-breaker, then a Methodist lay preacher, and he had a spell at sea - so we called him "Sailor"

"When 1 was at sea... " started John Brown - but nobody took any notice of him.

“Anyway he's a man of some means now and he's keen to sponsor a community of his own to set the world to rights - he wants to show the benefits of a union of the working classes on two hundred acres of land he owns.

"It seems there's to be no class distinctions there, none of this doffing your hats to the Squire, and everybody will wear the same clothes. He's going to build 50 houses from bricks made on the site and they're going to be heated from one Place, to save everybody having to make their own fires. The food will be cooked on some scientific apparatus and there's going to be a spacious dining-room so they all eat together



He's going to put up a large school-room and sleeping rooms for children from the age of two years to 12 and upwards and get the best Masters so the children will be educated far superior to the present nobility - perhaps he could even teach young Tom!

"Now you talk about machinery - well he's going to put in a steam engine for thrashing and grinding corn, as well as steaming food for cattle, and some contraption that will even polish your boots! With all this he reckons he'll cut the working day to just four hours and they'll have their own boat to pass all that leisure time and read poetry and cricket and bowls, and have elocution classes - they'll need translators too if they're going to understand the Manea accents!"

"No need, Manea folk's won't stand for all that, that's not natural"

"I wouldn't mind a bit of that, though", chipped in another. "There must be a catch somewhere"

“Not really, continued Bird - except of course that you have to contribute £15 to help set it all up". At which the assembled contingent laughed heartily and returned to the more pressing aspects of real life

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Despite all he'd heard of the fenland area - the webbed feet at Manea, the riots at Littleport and Little Thetford, the bodysnatching and the like, Pickwick still felt a perverse desire to visit the place to see for himself Will Spread, the bargee had mentioned giant new steam pumping stations being erected to drain the tens, and surely there was a magnificent cathedral at Ely.

He turned to Bird, who drove for Swann's, to seek some practical advice. His notebook contains jottings of the times of the various stagecoaches - the Nelson or the Sociable both made the return journeys on Monday, Wednesday and Friday, or he could make the trip by William Crabb's boat on its regular passage from Cambridge to Wisbech.

But of course he could take a ride with Will Bird himself for Marsh and Swann's wagons made the trip everyday, stopping in Ely just opposite the Gaol in Market Street. "If you got time to spare, waiting or the coach you can sometimes go across to the gaol and take a peep at the prisoners, you might have to bribe the gaoler but that's really worth seeing anytime you're passing. That's a rickety old place and some of the prisoners, in the cells upstairs have to wear big spiked collars - stick out either side of their necks - so they can't break a hole in the roof and climb out. You can hear them moaning and rattling their chains, the walls are covered in scratchings they've made - there's even a gallows one of them poor lads drew, perhaps he was one of them Littleport rioters they hanged.

"Mind you if you're interested in such things you should go out into Padnal Fen, on the way to Littleport - that's where they hung Rolfe - you've heard that tale surely... "Pickwick had not and was

then regaled with an account of an incident 15 years before when two poachers had agreed to murder a local gamekeeper against whom they had some spite. "They went out and dug a grave for their intended victim and then one dark night John Rolfe knocked on his mate's door - chap named Landon – and together they set off. They went off to the grave and waited for the gamekeeper – only he didn't show. They reckon how Landon was looking out for him when Rolfe clouted him over the head with the spade, pushed him in the grave still alive and buried him before he could get out. The body was discovered days later by a couple of shooters out with their dog.

"The thing that gave the game away was that the corpse didn't have no boots on – and Rolfe was wearing a pair just like the ones' missing - they reckon he'd pinched his mate's shoes while he was lying there. Anyway Rolfe was convicted and hanged. Then they covered his body in pitch, put it in hoops and hung it on chains out in the fen, where his father could see it from his house. That's become a real attraction to people walking and skating, 1'nl been up to it myself, hearing it moan and squeak in the wind... I reckon that could be still there"

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"Ely - that's one place I have not been to for many years and have no wish to return. When I was there there was not a pain of glass in any of the windows of the shops in the High Street, the Fore Hill was in bad weather in a worse state than the fen drove, the ruts so deep as to prevent traffic with carts or wagons, and they had to put large lumps of wood across the streets, in various places, so you could cross over. There was no lights and Old Dames wore red cloaks, walked in patterns, and carried lamps after sunset"

"Ah but things are different now", added another. " Couple of years ago the main streets were lighted up with coal gas with lamps placed on painted cast iron pillars. Many of the shops and inns have put up their own lights now. Market street, St Mary's St Broad Street and or Fore Hill have been paved and they've just put a new iron bridge across the river. Mind you there's not the number of pubs there used to be. The Red Lion has been changed into a draper's shop, the Old Bell pub has been rebuilt and they've made changes at the White Hart inn.

"Yes but there's other changes they'll need to make before things really get better. My uncle Joseph Layton used to live in Walpole Lane. He went to his work as a thrasher on the Saturday morning in the Spring of 1832 but came home with dizziness in his head and cramps in his leg. He had no meat for a fortnight - him and my aunt lived on dumplings and potatoes and bread and sometimes butter. They got their water from the river - he always went on a Sunday morning for two pail fulls of water which lasted them through the week - that never did them no harm. But he was took ill and complained of the smell of the pigsties. Of course the walls of the house were sometimes damp - they always are in the fens and even on the top of the hill at Ely that can be damp."

" My folks lived in Bull Lane and got their water from the ditch, otherwise they had to go all the way to the river. I have seen dead dogs thrown into that ditch and the muck from Cuttress's cows also gets into it. There was no wonder they got the plague of cholera about six years ago."

"Yes but they dare not admit it for several weeks" said Dick Bird and even after Paul Gotobed died in they tried to make out it was only due to natural causes. But I saw his wrist and face

and they were of a very dark colour during the whole of his illness. He was only 12 years old when he died. But then the cases just keep breaking out in various parts of the Town and on just three days 49 people were attacked and 18 of them died. Magistrates kept on about burying the dead early, and of fumigating the infected houses. But several people in a family who came from a distance to attend the funerals of their relatives took the disease and died. One chap lost his wife and three children and himself caught the plague".

"I knew one young woman - a dressmaker from Sutton - who went to a funeral of a relation, dined with the other people there at one o'clock on Sunday, was taken ill at three o'clock and died before 10. And a sister of hers who visited her before the death was also been attacked. Two bearers and a mourner who attended the same funeral were also taken ill. I heard one of the doctors say that he had witnessed more scenes of horror and misery in one hour than in the whole course of his professional experience – of course its all cleared up now"

"I reckon I know what really caused it", chipped in a well-built individual, and all turned to listen

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"I reckon that fever would not have happened if they had not cut that new big straight river between Ely and Littleport" came the somewhat surprising opinion form one of the company in the Wellington. Others joined in:

"Mind you that did make a lot of work, and they spent a lot of money on it". "Yes and on the celebrations when they opened it back in April 1830. Did you see the commissioners marching down from the Lamb Inn to the Quay, with the Charity children of Ely in front, the band of the Cambridgeshire militia, the colours of the Ely volunteers, and parties of the working men who had been employed in excavating the cut, and of the water boys working on the stream?"

"Think I did – I was one of them. Did you see the commissioners' barge, and all the other barges and boats fitted up and decorated for the occasion, and weren't there a large party of ladies got on them for the boat trip along the new river to Littleport. Not that they could see much, the banks are so high and the river so straight. That was five o'clock, before they got back to Ely – well they stopped some time looking at that new dredger – you talk about machinery on the farm, that thing can dig a ton a minute – that'll see the end of a good many jobs."

"Didn't take them long to get back to the Lamb for their dinner though, did it. Mind you I never thought that would happen – I never thought you'd get the drainers and the navigators to work together, they're usually at each other's throats – well the drainers want to get rid of the water and the boat owners want to keep it in the river so they can float their barges. That was old Beales that was largely behind that, none of the others wanted it – he said they must trade upon deep rivers. If the Eau Brink commissioners get themselves sorted out, and they put Denver Sluice to rights – if they ever do – that'll be the making of the river people" "Yes, just in time for the railway to take their trade away"

"But what I say is that when they dug that big new river through the marshy Padnal fen they must have stirred up all sorts of bugs and insects that used to live in the marshes there – and the spirits of those poor souls they hanged on the gibbet. I reckon how that changed the quality of the river water – my aunt says that ain't been the same since – and that was what caused the fever they had in Ely". "You talk as daft as Bill Harrison of Downham – what do they call him, 'Poet Laureate of the fens'"

At this Pickwick pricked up his ears and soon afterwards picked up a copy of the verses William Harrison had penned for the occasion of the opening of the South Level Cut – he added a copy to his scrapbook. The rhymes telling how the 'glad exulting Ouse had come to wed his virgin spouse' were not to his taste. But there was something in some of it – "Long his streams have spent their force, Winding in the serpent's course, Or with stagnant waters wide Overflowed his swampy side". Harrison forward to the day "When instead of deluged moors, Zig-zag streams and jetty'd shores, When the swain shall plough and sow, Where the fisher used to row and Waving cornfields supersede Swampy wastes of sedge and reed".

There was no doubt – if he did not get up into fenland soon it would all have gone before he got there!

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By now the gathering in "The Wellington" was getting raucous.

"I can tell you why they managed to dig that river from Ely to Littleport – its because they were organised" The speaker spoke in an accent Pickwick recognised as emanating from London, clearly he was not local, but clearly he had the ears of those who were. "It's no good all your little protests here and trashing machine breaking there, you'll not get anywhere until you get properly organised – you should combine. The working classes are the only possessors of real capital – our labour. If we become distributors as well as producers of capital, it would soon be seen that we could do without money – like they're talking about at Manea. A stone might be made to answer the purpose of gold. We have only to take the power in to our own hands, and it would be discovered that instead of being the lower classes, we are in reality the higher. We need only unite to show the capitalist that gold is not capital."

"Hold you on boy", Badcock urged, "mind you tongue. You'll talking wild talk. There's no god you trying to preach trade unions here – we know all about them. Here in Cambridge that's been the tailors have been leading the struggle for a living wage. There was that dispute – when was it – back in 1827 when the master tailors were saying that their men were striking for double wages – only they were trying to break up their union" "Well they tried the same game 100 years before that", added another, "I remember my grand-dad telling me"

"And don't forget the shoemakers – we had that meeting at Bridges auction room four years ago after John Bentley tried to sack three of his workmen because they had joined the trades union. Banham told him the Unions were not against him – they weren't out to injure a liberal master but to bring up the low shops

"But he told Smith and Auber to their faces – he had no dispute with their work but he was determined to be master, and would not be dictated to. He was worried because he thought we were going to strike and wanted to make those who hung back afraid of joining the union. But it was in the power of the master to punish them by not giving them adequate Employment, and they would not have felt secure of justice being done them, except all the men belong to the union. If they gave the master an opportunity of doing this, they might be treated worse than slaves. Well why might not the poor man associate to protect himself like the rich Freemasons do?

"So we agreed that a sufficient capital should be raised to employ the shoemakers, who had struck, by loans from the different unions, - well the bricklayers, plasterers, carpenters, masons and painters had lodges in Cambridge at that time and a shilling per week was levied of every member of the union by the Superior Union or Grand Lodge in London. We had the support of the Northampton district of the Grand National Consolidated Trades Union and they sent £5 to help our funds

The whole affair went off very peacefully, there were nearly two hundred persons present. – but then the magistrates stepped in

[ILLUSTRATION : a strike poster of 1827 - Everyone needs clothes and shoes]

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Pickwick could hardly believe that he was listening to men discussing a mass trades union demonstration, here in Cambridge, just four years earlier. This must have been about about the time when the agricultural labourers in Tolpuddle, Dorset were being indicted for just such an activity and earning themselves the title of "Martyrs"

Now it appeared that the Cambridge men had also formed a union trying to force shoemakers to raise wages – and the full force of law had been brought against them. By May 1838 several of the men who had at first joined the union had left given evidence against Edwin James Dixon and John Phipps, President and secretary of the Friendly society of operative cordwainers and general union for the protection of labour. They were then accused of an unlawful combination and conspiracy. "Well that put the wind up the other men – most of them left and signed a declaration saying how they would never join another Trades Union". "

Inevitably John brown had all the details. "Well they tried to play it down. Dixon and Phipps' council – Mr Auster - said that bearing in mind that the circumstances of this case occurred previous to the proceedings at Dorchester, subsequently to which the general union society had been discontinued, and as the then defendants were sorry for having violated the law, he had advised them to plead guilty and place themselves in the hands of his Lordship.

"But when the clerk asked them how they pleaded they said "Not guilty". That surprised everybody. Even Auster was so sure that no proceedings would have taken place, he hadn't read all the papers. So they had to adjourn the case till the next day

"Then on the Wednesday, Mr Gunning, the prosecutor, told the jury how this was a charge against the defendants for administering oaths contrary to law. He said he begged to impress upon all parties that had been connected with it that their best, safest, and wisest plan would always be to desist from such combinations, for it was quite impossible that they could ever be permitted. As, however, the society was now broken up, knowing that the defendants were sorry for having violated the law, and hoping everyone knew that such proceedings were illegal, he declined to call any evidence against the defendants

"The judge said how these proceedings were instituted to make it generally known that these associations were illegal, and that all who engaged in them were subjecting themselves to very severe punishment. He said how combinations where oaths were administered that bound the parties to keep secrets, could not be tolerated – for people could not then give evidence against the union while they were in it, and if they left it then the other union men would turn against them. But with respect to Dixon and Phipps he couldn't say anything, because as Gunning weren't going to present any evidence they were to be presumed as innocent .

"Of course Dixon never denied it – he said how they were trying to alleviate the wants of their fellow men. It was never their intention to act against the law, and they were sorry that it had been infringed. Well by then the unions in the kingdom were banned by the Government & not one was left in Cambridge – he said there would never be one ever again – but I don't reckon he meant it!".

[PICTURE : tranquil Cambridge was a scene of mass trade union disputes]

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The mood in the Wellington inn, Wellington Row in the Cambridge back streets became reflective as people remembered the incidents of trade union protest of a few years before.

But then John Brown once more added his own experiences for the benefit of anyone who cared to listen.

“I went on strike once, that was some time ago now, when I was just making my way in the world. Down in London it was. I had just begun to earn good money - a guinea a week - as a shoe maker and I got a regular seat of works so it became necessary that I should join the trade or shops - meeting, which was a combination for the support of wages. Each member played a certain amount monthly, in order to raise a fund for the support of families when a strike took place, whether in one shop or more as the case may be: the men being at the same time furnished with ‘trampling money’ - about 12 or 14 shillings - to enable them to go into the country until the dispute betwixt employer and employed is for the time adjusted. All persons subscribing to this fund were called ‘flints’, while those who did not join were honoured with the dignified title of ‘scabs’. During these struggles fights, and consequent imprisonments were very common

“This was at the time when the war against Napoleon had raised all articles of consumption up to famine price, so that men having large families could not earn sufficient to buy them food. So a feeling of discontent arose in most Trades, and a general ‘strike’ was the result in our own. I attended meetings at the different public houses where they were held, and heard the great orators of the craft - better than you” - this to the rabble-rouser who had sparked the discussion initially. “They were men of ragged habiliments and of squalid appearance but could pour forth words in eloquent language their appeals to us unmarried men to support them in their death struggle. So it was agreed that the strike should be general, and as none could in consequence subscribes towards the relieving Fund, some hundreds of pounds were borrowed from the carriers, carpenters, and other trades in support of our cause. Nearly all the single men packed up their seats and went on tramp, as they were not allowed any relief; but I remained in town, and determined to pledge my clothes, books, and such valuables as I possessed, in hopes of redeeming them when I got to work again.

“Week after week passed on: the pawnbrokers’ store rooms were crowded; families were reduced to the greatest misery, having parted with their beds, furniture, clothes, in fact anything and everything that would fetch money; The men were reduced to mere shadows, with countenances expressive of despair; and mothers were crying over their starving children, while the little ones clamoured for food. Such scenes of indescribable misery I hope never to witness again!”

By now everybody in the tavern was engrossed in John Brown’s story, so similar to their own experiences.

[ILLUSTRATION : on the tramp or exiled wandering the lanes– P95]

96

John Brown had the ear of everyone in the pub as he told of the hardships he had experienced as a London shoemaker on strike

“The tenth week of this siege had terminated, and we appeared no nearer to our end; the wretchedness by which I was surrounded became intolerable; I resolved to pack up all my possessions and go elsewhere. I felt reckless; all my little store was exhausted but a couple of

shirts; so putting my tools together and wrapping them in my apron I took leave of my friends with a sorrowful heart. I walked moodily among, without thinking or caring which way I went. The amount of my worldly riches was 10 pence half-penny. I wandered as far as Oxford Street and there stood gazing at the shops and carriages and the well dressed people as they passed by".

And then turning to Pickwick he commented; "People like you, Sir, sitting here now amongst us but then you would have had no time for the likes of me. Then again with out any definite purpose I strolled along think I had got clear of London, and found myself on the open road I walked on as far as Broxbourne where I put down my bundle on a seat outside a public house, called for a pint of porter, and, with a twopenny twist from the nearest baker's shop, made a modest dinner. When I had finished, I requested the landlady to allow me to leave my bundle while I went round the town to seek work. There was no work to be had

"I made a bed for myself beneath a hedge and fell asleep. When I awoke the sun was fast rising, my senses reeled and I wondered what to do, with only sixpence in my pocket. I considered returning to London but then I had a change of fortune. For it was then that I met Mr Bird here who drives Swann's wagon and he allows me to journey with him to Cambridge.

"And as you all know I have made my fortune here, finding success in so many different avenues, but nowhere am I more at home than here in this area called Barnwell, for I was born not far from this Tavern"

Turning to Pickwick he then extended an invitation to accompany him further into the lanes and alleys and to learn more of the people eking a tenuous living for themselves from the edge of the richness amongst the grand buildings of the town centre.

Pickwick had no hesitation in accepting but with profuse apologies indicated that it would need to be a journey made on another occasion. For now the day was passing and he had promised to return Tom to the chimney sweep by the end of the afternoon.

It was with great reluctance that he left the company of people he now considered his friends and with Tom pushing is bathchair set out once more for the other Cambridge, just across Parker's Piece.

[ILLUSTRATIONS : John Brown later told his story in his autobiography – BrownP96 Broxbourne where Brown got a lift – Broxbourn]

97

As Pickwick left the Wellington, turning his back on Barnwell and headed towards Parker's Piece so Tom, the chimney-sweep boy began once more to become agitated and afraid.

His apprehension seemed justified when a rough, soot-grimed hand, struck him a blow about the ears, sending him tumbling to the ground. Pickwick glanced around to see Chumley, the chimney sweep glowering down at the lad.

"How many times have I told you not to come to this part of Cambridge on your own! That's no good you saying you've got this old gent as protection, he couldn't look defend you if the Parsons came after you. Do as you're told – get away with you now!"

Tom dragged himself to his feet and ran off and Pickwick turned to face the snarling bully of an employer, demanding an explanation.

“I’m sorry about that, sir, but I love that lad as if he were me own. Well he is, in a manner of speaking – leastways that was me that found him”. And here Chumley told the tale, which seemed incredible, but was later confirmed as true

“It was about half past one o'clock one Sunday morning I was passing a road which runs at the back of a portion of New Square and Orchard Street when all of an instant my attention was directed to the noise resembling the faint cry of an infant. I made a search and discovered a tiny child perfectly naked upon its back in the mud. I immediately conveyed it to the Police station house – just over there opposite Christ’s Pieces - when he was evident the little stranger had been born but a few minutes. It was delivered to the care of Mrs Smith, wife of one of the police sergeant, who had a young child of her own, and a surgeon was sent for. By his prompt attention the life of the child was preserved.

“In the morning most active and diligent inquiries were made by the police, and the superintendent went twice to the house of Mrs Mason, the bed maker, of Caius College, who resides in Orchard Street, and the back of whose house ran up the lane where the child was found. Mrs Mason said she had a servant, but she was gone to college to do the work. After further inquiry however, sufficient was elicited to cause the girls apprehension; and having been examined by Mr Cribb, the surgeon, she admitted that the child was hers, that she had delivered herself about 10 minutes before the child was found, and having done that, went down from her own room into the Yard, and threw the infant over the wall, which is between six and seven feet high.

“Well what chance did the poor mite and his mother have after that? I was determined that Tom should be looked after and when he was old enough to come out of the workhouse I took him on as a chimney-sweep boy. Now I know people say its cruel to send them up burning chimneys or down stinking privies, but he eats well, he has a warm home to go back to, and when he grows too big – and he soon will – why he’ll have a trade that he knows. People will always want chimneys swept, especially in a place like Cambridge. But for the meantime I must keep him on a tight rein. I cannot have happen to him what happened to that other lad – just over there in the fields off Mill Road”

[PICTURE : GONVILLE AND CAIUS COLLEGE, Trinity Street, where the mother worked as a servant]

98

Pickwick was being pushed in his bathchair down East Road towards Parker’s Piece by chimneysweep, Chumley.

On their left-hand side new houses were in course of erection, part of the swiftly-growing Barnwell estate. But the sweep was referring to an incident which had happened 15 years earlier, when the entire area was open fields, bar a few houses in New Street and some hovels alongside a gravel pit.

“There was a young lad – 17 year old – name of Welch – though some called him Markham on account of how he lived with his uncle. He was working in the pit screening gravel but that were a rainy day & he couldn’t work so he took a stroll. Anyway he soon came back, very upset – said how he’d met some University gent who’d tried to kiss & molest him and had give him sixpence, with more if he went back later that night

“So his mates at the pit - Joseph Hart, James and William Buttriss and the chap Wiseman decided to check this out. They hid up in a ditch in the field the other side of the osier bed – over there near the Mill Road – and waited to see if he showed.

“True enough he came when he said he would and they heard everything that went on. Then out they pounced and collared hold of the University bod – caught him with his trousers down around his ankles. They bundled him across the field and over the stile – and that was a performance I can tell you – him trying to climb over with his trousers down - and into a farmyard with a haystack. They said they’d take him to Purchas, the magistrate.

“Anyhow this chap – he said his name was Jefferson (only that weren’t) and he was a Fellow of St John’s college (which he was) – he was real upset, said he was only relieving himself behind a hedge, but then offered them money, and his watch if they’d let him go. Well that were a gold watch and you can work a long time for the £3 he was willing to pay so they let him get away, thinking they had taught him a lesson.

“Next morning this chap ‘Jefferson’ went to the magistrate. He said he’d just been on a walk to Horningsea and ended up by the cricket field – over there to the north of Mill Road, just across from the windmill. But you wouldn’t be walking across the middle of the fields, like he was. He claimed how they’d pounced on him when he was responding to a call of nature, pulled him across the fields and threatened to take him into town with his trousers down and give the girls a laugh. He said he’d been forced to give them his watch so they would let him go. But if that were so why did he run off to London the next day, when he should have been lecturing.

“And another thing, when Joseph Hart and some of the others went to see him at the college the next night why didn’t he call for the porter and have the great gate shut against them. Instead of that he ran into his rooms and locked both the doors

“Anyway that got to court but nothing was decided – well that was the word of some Barnwell roughs against that of a Resident Fellow of the University. But I don’t let any of my lads out around this part of town if I can stop them”

99

Chimney sweep Chumley was continued to rage against undergraduate excesses as he trundled Pickwick around the edge of Parker’s Piece.

“When I was a younger man – 20 years ago – this bit of grass was real rough – well they used to ride horses on it, causing ruts, and there was a horse pond that used to stink to high heaven – mind you that were a wonderful place for children to play, and then there were ditches everywhere that you could hide in.

“Well one evening – February 1818 - several University gentlemen went to dine at St John’s college. It seems they started at half-past-seven and remained drinking till near eleven at night by which time they were somewhat drunk. Most of them staggered off to bed, but two decided to make their way across to Barnwell, for the company of the young ladies over there - if you get my meaning.

“One of them ran off to get there as quick as he could, but the other was so drunk he could not get his gown on alone, somebody had to help him with it. You see undergraduates have to wear their gowns when they go out in the town or they’re in trouble if caught. This chap got to Parker’s Piece but then got lost and fell into one of those muddy ditches I was telling you about. It was only knee deep and he managed to struggle out of it, but then he fell back. He did this a time or two, apparently. But then for some reason he decided it would be easier without his gown, then his jacket -–well in fact he took everything off except for his pantaloons and his stockings – and he'd pulled them down to his ankles so he couldn’t move.

“They found him next morning sitting in the ditch in eighteen inches of water, stone cold dead. The coroner decided he’d died, not through drowning but through exposure to the coldness of the night, and that it had been caused through being drunk.

“Well that caused a proper stink. Rev Frederick Maberly from Chesterton (– now there is a character!) – really went at it – talking about how they were fast approaching the state of Sodom and Gomorrah, giving themselves over to fornication – and how it was all the fault of the nude pictures in the Fitzwilliam Museum, which corrupted the undergraduates. Mind you nobody took much notice – the pictures are still on view, and they’re even building a big new Museum now – you must have seen it when you came in from Trumpington

“Of course it’s all changed now – not the drinking, but the state of the Piece. Town Council have been levelling it off, doing away with the ridges left over from when it was a field, before the council swapped it in the 1600s for a bit of land behind Trinity college – well you know that it was in those days leased out to the cook of Trinity, Edward Parker and that’s how it got its name.
“In the last little while though they’ve been using it for cricket matches. In 1831 that they levelled a sixty-yard square to provide a pitch for both University and town cricketers. Do you know that it 1832 there was a match between the town of Cambridge and the Marylebone Cricket Club – thousands of people turned out to watch and there were dozens of tents and booths all over the Piece. The University club played Eton there in May this year but if there’s one name best associated with the area today it’s not Parker but Fenner!”

[Picture : nude paintings in the Fitzwilliam Museum, then housed in the Perse School buildings in Free School Lane]

100

Chumley, the chimney sweep, revealed an unexpected passion for a fine manly game – cricket. He launched into an impassioned account of a match which had taken place in May between Cambridge University and the town. The University had beaten the Marylebone club previous week and strengthened their squad with eminent players including the Honourable F. Ponsonby, considered by many the best gentleman batter in England. Many thought that the town players had little chance against such a muster and the betting was 2 to 1 on the University. Town players however were not without friends and the odds were taken freely

By the time Parker's Piece had been cleared on the Monday morning there were several spectators. The University opened and Messrs Sayers and Seymour began the fray in good style, the former making a fine hit between point and slip from the first ball delivered scoring four with it. These gave him confidence and he played fearlessly and skilfully till his score amounted to 16 when he gave a decided catch to Mr Herbert at the long slip – who dropped it! This was vexatious to his brother fieldsmen but no grumbling said one and amends were made by in the very next hit when he took a markedly more difficult catch. Mr Kirwan followed without benefiting his party, being bowled out by Mr Edwards without a run. This brought in Mr Taylor the ‘out and outer’, a young player who many considered the ‘pilch’ of gentlemen cricketers - nothing being too difficult for him to play when once when he. However one of Mr Fenner’s very best rippers found the way to his wicket and he had affixed to his name a round nought to the dismay of his party and the gratification of their opponents.

‘Steady’ said one of the town players who from experience was more staid than the younkers and knew they had more teasers to follow yet who would probably be more fortunate than the skilful one just down. So it proved with Mr Thornhill playing in a very proper style, stopping

with judgement when in danger, and hitting with skill and severity on every opportunity. Mr Seymour was caught by Fenner after scoring eight and he then bowled Mr Broughton without his adding to the score. This brought in the Honourable Mr Ponsonby but he was quickly bowled out by Edwards. Mr Thornhill continued at the wicket until the last but one of his party joined in when it was Fenner with a splendid ball who took his wicket after he had added 32 to the score.

It was not all over. Mr Thackeray scored 8 not out, five of which were gained by his going in at a fine length ball and hitting far beyond the fieldsmen even though they were extended as far as they could for his peculiar style. The final University score was 99. The fielding of the town was excellent particularly the back-stopping of J Hall

Fenner and Boutell opened for the town and Fenner played in masterly style. His hitting and stopping were truly beautiful. After gaining 27 he made a most splendid hit to the leg which was admirably caught. Boutell was run out which made way for Haggis, whose sweet and showy style gave general satisfaction though he has a habit of walking behind the wicket every time he receives a ball and taking a long time before he takes his stand again. He scored 28. Wickets continued to fall but Mr Edwards played with skill and judgement being in with eight of his party and adding 31 to the score By the end of the first innings they had amassed 129, 30 more than the university.

The supporters of the University were however still nutty considering the bad luck of some of their best men in the first innings. But Mr Sayers was bowled for one run one and Mr Kirwan was barnacled having his wicket lowered without a run, as in the first innings. They then played out the rest of the day with great care. The town was on top. But then the weather turned against them.

101

The chimney sweep continued with his account of a cricket match between the Town and University clubs in May 1838

“On Tuesday there was no play the weather being unpropitious and on Wednesday the match was forwarded but little, a few overs were given and 15 scored when the rain stopped father progress. So it was Thursday then this prolonged but very interesting game was resumed. It all hinged for the University on how Taylor played – there was a bet of three sovereigns that he would get 60 runs in the second innings to make up for his duck first time. His score went up – 40, 50, 60 – without offering a single chance, then it was Fenner who got him, for 73. The rest of the team took the score to 179, leaving the town 150 to win

They set to with spirit but none of the town men really got going - Fenner scored but 16, Boutell got himself run out for nought which brought Haggis in – well he’s got a free and shewy style but he has this knack of walking behind his wicket every time he receives a ball, and it takes a long time for him take his stand again. Not that he was there long before he was bowled for four. There was a bit of a rally, Boning got 29, Pryor 26. It continued the next day with batsmen scoring only a few runs. Mr Stearn played well, he scored nine when one of Kirwan’s trimmers lowered his wickets.

The game was now highly interesting - seven wickets down, 18 runs to get, and Edwards in fine play - a real teazer that morning. Carpenter joined in and the

spectators were all on tiptoe. But Carpenter was caught for one, and Boutell, rendered no service being bowled without a run.

‘The university will win’ was the general cry as Johnson took the bat, but he made a hit to the leg getting four for it. The game was not lost yet. Eight for the Town to win.

Johnson scored a run then Edwards had the bowling. ‘That’s favourable’, was the whisper. One was delivered, but no hit - a second and the bowler appealed to the umpire, ‘How is that’. Out leg before wicket! The University had won by seven runs!.

I was sorry to observe Mr Edwards’ disputed the decision, it was galling and vexatious, I know, to have victory wrested from his grasp but Mr Caldecourt, the umpire, is known to be one of the best judges of the game, and is equally just and impartial

But it was Fenner who really made his mark - indeed we all thought that if he was not engaged as a player in the Coronation match, North of England against South of England at Lord's on the 21st of June it would be a crime.

And talking of crime, ain’t that a disgrace – and here he pointed towards the big edifice that loomed sombre across Parker’s Piece. No, not the Town Gaol – though that’s been the topic of much argument and dispute I can tell you – no I mean the state of the grass – Town Council spend so much money putting it right and getting it flat, and then people dig it up to lay drains from their houses to the new sewer!”

102

As Chumley pushed Pickwick’s bathchair around the edge of Parker’s Piece his foot slipped in something unpleasant, and he cursed.

“Ruddy dogs! Mess everywhere. Wherever you go there’s dogs roaming the streets, barking at horses, chasing carriages – it’s a proper disgrace”

“It’s the same in London”, reported Pickwick. “Why in Kensington things have got so bad that the magistrates have issued orders to the inspector of police, beadles, and parochial constables, to seize all dogs roaming at large, and, should the owner not appear, they are to be destroyed

“There’s been considerable alarm in that neighbourhood in consequence of the large number of dogs kept by the poor inhabitants, for the purpose of drawing carts, which have been prowling loose about the streets, some of them apparently in a rabid state. The beadles went to a place called the Potteries at Notting Hill, where they found in most of the houses no less than 4,6, and even 8 dogs, many of them of a very ferocious description, besides a large number of fast growing puppies. During their inquiries they also learnt of the death of the daughter of one of the inmates, a young girl Eliza Crook from hydrophobia, produced by the bite of a dog.”

“In fact just the day I left London to come to Cambridge I saw a notice stuck up in the street to say how they were going to ban people using dog carts or trucks, and there’d be a £2 fine. Apparently they’ve just discovered there’s an old act banning them”

Chumley was adamant that this would never work in Cambridge – and anyway there were problems enough enforcing the laws they already had – especially those over where you could leave animals.

He launched into an account of how Nicholas and Susan Saunders had, that July, been indicted for an assault on Thomas Winnell the pindar of the parish of Trumpington.

“You see Nicholas went to a pub in Trumpington on his old ass. While he was drinking inside the left the animal grazing by the side of the road. Well the pindar spotted it and locked it in the pound – well that’s what he was supposed to do – you can’t have animals roaming everywhere. Anyway then Thomas went for a drink and up comes Susan Saunders and asks for her husband’s ass back. Of course Thomas told her she could have it back if she paid the 4d fee to get it out of the pound – and she weren’t going to have that. So up come her husband and together they both " wapped on to him”. At the trial they tried to make out that the pindar told them that if they would give him a pot or two of beer now and then he would only meddle with the donkey when he saw some farmers on the road. Well the pindar denied saying any such thing and the two of them were sent to prison for 10 days

“Mind you not that the pindar’s aren’t out to make a money when they can – take the case of the one at St Giles’ parish a couple of years ago”

103

"Thomas Preston kept a beer shop in Newnham . he weren't doing too well, in fact he was bankrupt and Mr Gotobed the brewer was a large creditor. But he did have three or four cows which Gotobed had lent him the money to buy
.
"Now I was in Preston's beer house along with Thomas Apthorpe, Robert Hagger, Charles Mayles and William Cooke - he's the pindar for St Giles' parish. Well there was a quarrel when Preston refused to draw more beer for Cooke and Cooke told him he'd pound his cows before morning. Well these cattle were on Queen's Green . I saw them myself about 11 o'clock that night, but fm not about to tell you which flue I was about to clean at that hour, so don't you ask me!

"Anyway John Bonnett had been to Midsummer Fair - he'd gone there at four in the afternoon and stayed till three in the morning. Well he'd saved up 1/6 and said he'd spent the whole lot on gingerbread cakes., and not had a drop of beer (if you can believe it}.

He swore he'd seen Cooke, the pindar, drive the cows out on to the road and take them in the direction of the pound. Henry Hunns said one of his mother's cows was also pounded by Cooke that night & he had paid 1/- to get it back. The lawful fee is just 4d, though Thomas Toffs, one of the surveyors of the highways did say he'd authorised the higher charge because of the damage done by cattle that were allowed to stray all night.

"Robert Hagger said he was at the fair with Cooke that night - 27th June - & returned in his company along with Charles Mayles; they went home by the Backs of the colleges and found the cows feeding by side of road between King's Spring and Gerard's Hostel Lane. So they, being helpful blokes, gave Cooke a hand to drive the cattle to the pound. That was funny because I'd seen all three of them in the beerhouse - which he had to admit was true but said he did not hear the quarrel or threat to impound Preston's cattle - though Charles Mayles said he did - well it was loud enough for the whole street to hear.

"Sarah Coxal said she got out of bed after bearing some noise, looked out her window, saw Cooke lock the cattle in the pound and then heard town clocks strike 2am. But there's so much

noise at night, especially when they're driving cattle to the pound, because that starts all the other animals up that she must have misheard the time. Well there's so many clocks chiming and clanging, its easy to get confused and just to make it worse the one at Trinity college strikes twice.

Anyway the judge and jury weren't fooled. They found Cooke, the pindar, guilty- sentenced him to one month imprisonment. Well that were a bit of a Stallan job, if you get my meaning - driving the cattle on to the road purposely so he could lock them up.

This was the second time Stallan's name had be mentioned, but before Pickwick could press him further Chumley had started to relate a similar problem they'd had at Godmanchester

104

Pickwick was not sure he needed to know about the minutiae of who could put their cows where and when – though he does seem to have jotted down some of the Cambridge detail.– Geldings and cows could be put on Coldham's Common, Sturbridge common, and Midsummer Green from Old May Day to Old Candelmas Day, but entire horses only on Sturbridge and on certain others it was day-time only, and Empty Common was full all year – and no wonder there was need for a pindar. He recalled an ancient saying "Right's right, Wrong's no man's right, Except the Pindar" – if he said your cattle were in the wrong place his word was law – so pay up and shut up.

And of course you can only put your cattle on the commons at certain times and only certain people have the rights, as Chumley was relating.

"There was a do at Godmanchester – out near Huntingdon – when a chap, named Matson, turned his cows on the common – he thought he would put his stock with the rest, and nobody would notice. So he did, repeatedly – and just as repeatedly they were impounded.

"You see he wasn't a freeman. Now to be a freeman you had to be the son of a freeman and pay a fine to the Borough, when you turned 21, but you also had to live in a commonable house, of which there were several in Godmanchester. Well this bloke did live in a commonable house, but he wasn't qualified by birth

"This had gone on for hundreds of years – the corporation planted trees, cut them down, sold them, cleaned out the ditches, branded sheep – and impounded cattle that shouldn't be there. Martin Hunnybun, the town clerk produced all the old documents dating back to King John when it came to court.

"But there'd been an Enclosure Act and that gave the right of stocking distinctly to the occupiers of the commonable houses, and didn't mention the freemen bit. Now before the Enclosure a commoner could send his cattle over 4,000 acres of land in the open field – but these had now been taken away, so surely everybody had the right on the commons – that was his argument

"He felt he was a little man up against a powerful body – no doubt they had been making entries in their other books to tell to their advantage in respect to the monopoly they wished to retain. You see the Godmanchester Corporation were always willing to make freemen of the wealthy for a little consideration but always refused the poor. And there was another complication for under another Act this power of creating freemen had been taken away & none beyond present race could be created – so what would happen in future if it does not pass to commonable householders

“Didn’t do him an good – the Jury found he had no right of common – but they gave him permission to appeal to the House of Lords, so how it will end up heaven knows”

By now they had arrived at the front of the Castle Inn. Pickwick bade farewell to the chimney sweep and hobbled upstairs to his room overlooking Emmanuel College.

[PICTURE : bridge between Huntingdon and Godmanchester]

105

Safely ensconced in his comfortable room at the Castle inn, overlooking Emmanuel College, Cambridge, Pickwick bathed, rested, dined and slept well. But not before he had compiled his journal of his third day in the town – a day in which he had learned of how Victoria’s coronation celebrations in Cambridge had been outshone by University’s procedures for installing their new Chancellor. And above all of the Duke of Wellington – having been in his company, at least in spirit, in the Senate House and at the tavern named after him in the Barnwell backstreets. There had been tales of bodysnatching, riot, trade unionism, child abuse, pindar abuse – and once more the name “Stallan” is underlined with a question mark after it. With all this spinning around in his brain he still spent a restful night.

Next morning he betook himself for the second time to Robert Adam’s barber’s shop in St Andrew’s street, resolved to investigate further. No sooner however had he started to describe his day, and mention the word “Barnwell” than the barber broke it with a tale that had him struggling to commit it to his memory.

“Barnwell – there really is an old part of the town. There used to be an Abbey out there, before the University arrived on the scene, but there’s little reminder now, just that old chapel, where they used to put the Lepers, and where they sell beer during the fair. Then there’s the old Exchequer barn – somebody told me how he went inside when he was a kid and found two stone coffins, one with bones in. He also said how there was a trapdoor in the middle of the floor that was the entrance to a tunnel running to the Leper chapel one way and Jesus College the other.

Some say the Abbey House is haunted. I wouldn’t be surprised seeing how it was home to one of the oddest characters in Cambridge - Jacob Butler – you must have heard about him? He was the Great-grandson of Alexander Butler who acquired the Barnwell Abbey estate in 1659 and inherited the Barnwell lands in 1714 when he was in his 30’s. He used to call himself “Squire of Barnwell” and in later years “Old Briton” because he fought for his rights.

He was a barrister, a graduate of Christ’s college and a man of massive physique, being six feet four inches tall and broad in proportion so his appearance in court, whether on his own business or other because, was striking.

He was frequently involved in court cases himself. He had a battle over the turnpike road from London to Cambridge when some money went missing while he was a Trustee. He was summoned, convicted and fined £10. This wasn’t the end of the case for but he went from one lawyer to another, even to the Solicitor General in dispute of the verdict. But that was only part of it. Then there was trouble over an Alderman who erected a dog kennel on a piece of ground belonging to him. Squire brought a lawsuit and won the day, but he gained a good many enemies over the case. Another row came over the cows and horses on the Commons: the Squire impounded several of the beasts in his masterly way, and there was an outcry. A subscription for fighting the case was made among the people who grazed their cattle and £50 was collected. Butler lost the case.

[PICTURES 105Butl – Jacob Butler, Squire of Barnwell]

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The barber continued the tale of one of Cambridge's former eccentrics.

"Jacob Butler he owned the field where the Stourbridge Fair booths have been set up from time immemorial on St Bartholomew's day. It is still held on the Common between Newmarket Road and the river. In its heyday it was a real little town laid out in rows – Garlic row, Brush row, cheese row. There used to be sections for cloth, iron and coal, and a cheap side. It used to attract tradesmen from all over Europe and people from all over the country. Well if you're staying on go and see for yourself – it's still held – and if you go on 24th August you might see some fun!

"There are some curious rules attached to Stourbridge fair which Jacob always saw were observed. If the corn is not harvested and off the field by August 24, the stall builders are at liberty to go and tread it down, to be ready by September 7 when the fair is proclaimed open. But if the stalls and booths aren't cleared by noon on Michaelmas Day the ploughmen could get their own back by entering the field with their ploughs, horses and carts, and destroy anything they see remaining. Well Jacob used to join in – pulling the stalls down and keeping the wood - why on one occasion he drove his carriage through the crockery stalls and smashed tons of it.

Really he had a soft heart, especially for the poorer folk and he always invited the dwarfs and Giants from the side shows to dine with him while the fair was on, and this was accepted as one of his Little eccentricities – but that wasn't the thing that really got people talking!

When he felt himself getting towards the end of his tether, he had a coffin made of oak which was so huge that several people might have got inside. Numerous visitors went to see it, and have a glass of wine with him – sometimes they played cards at it. Then his favourite dog died, and the loss accelerated his end – "I shall not live long now my dog is dead"; from that instant he was taken ill and never recovered.

His funeral in 1765 was a grand event, for he was the oldest barrister left at that time being 84 – though he had not practiced for some time, being considered cracked in his intellect.

According to his instructions they were to drive his giant coffin to Barnwell Church, on a farm cart drawn by his favourite horses Dragon and Brag. If they would not bury him there he was to be brought back and buried in a grass plot in the Abbey House grounds. Well that caused two problems – for he wasn't living at Abbey House then – he'd lost another lawsuit and moved to a house in Emmanuel Lane - and the coffin was so large it would not go into the church

But they outfoxed him for once. A normal hearse in front took his body in a leaded coffin to the Church, while the wagon behind drew the large oak coffin. Then after the service, the large oak coffin was lowered into the vault and the smaller one put down into it; for this the four men received half a guinea each, a nice sum then. They put up an account of him on six large mural tablets in churchyard – you can see them if you go that way

[PICTURES 106 booth : a booth at Stourbridge fair – Butler would smash them if they were not cleared in time; 106ch : Abbey church where Butler was buried 105abbey : Abbey House where Butler lived

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Freshly shaven, though still somewhat lame Pickwick elected to make his way into the town centre, though endeavouring to keep well away from the scenes of his earlier encounters. This caused him some difficulties in the stretch between St Andrew the Great church and Christ's college since he had no real desire to remeet either the money-collecting vicar or academic Henry Gunning, whose cheque remained in his pocket.

He found himself once more on the corner of Petty Cury with its ancient buildings and shops. Keeping well away from the Wrestler's Inn, where he had been tricked of his money, he cast his eyes around the traders.

It was a stranger mixture – Haxcarton the baker and Palmer the hatters, Robinson the butcher and Brune the carver, Pont who were dyeing and Fred Tillet the fishmongers. He could take his choice of at least two plumbers – Benton or Felton, while if the clatter of Stephen Pryor, tin-plate workers induced a headache then Watson the chemist had a potion to relieve it. If he were feeling faint there was a chair at Ibberson the upholsterers to collapse upon, and if time seemed to be standing still why John Harmsworth the watchmakers could start it going again.

But nothing much was going on in Petty Cury - none seemed to be doing much trade. His eyes everywhere but on the pavement he blundered into a brush being wielded by a jovial man who was wearing a concerned expression.

"Sorry, sir, my mind's not on the task in hand – tell the truth I don't know what I'm about at the moment, what with Anne, my wife, so ill". Thus was Pickwick acquainted with Samuel Weldon, one of Cambridge's finest butchers.

"This street's never busy during the Long Vacation – well many of the students lodge at the inns, which brings trade and keeps their kitchens busy – well that's how the street got it's name – Little Cookery. This time of year the only people about at night are the shop servants and working people who live in the lanes and alleys – places like Falcon Yard. At night if you look above the shops, where the shopkeeper's live – you'll see lights in the windows long before the shops close – and now the folk out at Chesterton are planning to close early – nine o'clock in Summer and eight other times. There's even talk of shutting down the market at 10 p.m. and if that comes about it will kill the trade.

"And to make matters harder to stomach some wit of an undergraduate has had the effrontery to mock us tradesmen in a little poem – well you what I've got one inside, if you'd care to see it".

Together they entered the butcher's shop, surprisingly clean given the dust that was swirled up each time a stagecoach clattered down the street and into the yard of the Lion Hotel.

[ILLUSTRATION : 107 : Petty Cury 1838]

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Inside Samuel Weldon's butcher's shop in Petty Cury Pickwick waited while Weldon produced a small pamphlet of a poem and thumbed through it, quoting extracts from time to time –

"'Cheesemongers know 'tis the Long Vacation,
For they've more maggots than half the nation'
– that got old Marshall on Peas Hill up in arms – he was sure he meant it to refer to him.

‘Now Brandy Merchants find their spirits low,
And don’t so brilliant and so freely flow’
– well that’s true enough, given the amount the University consumes.

“There’s another bit here –
‘Since all the Caps and Gowns have took their leave,
The Tailors find they have got time to breath:
In times like these they know full well the Snobs’ – that’s what us townsfolk are called in the university slang –
‘Can give them now and then but mending jobs;
They can’t afford to have a brand new suit,
But turn their last year’s clothes for substitute’.
Well have you heard of the strikes and whatever” – and when Pickwick said he had indeed, Weldon seemed disappointed. Nevertheless he continued to thumb through the poems.

“’The Shoemakers now, and the Snobs who mend,
Look upon the last and think upon the end
Of term; for now the Gownsmen’s orders cease,
And want of work ‘mongst journeymen increase’
– there’s a chap here in Cambridge, used to be a shoemaker, reckons he knows everything …”
“John Brown” chipped in Pickwick, and Weldon stopped short and turned back to his browsing.

“’The Cambridge bakers now look very white,
And all the bread they bake is very light,
They bake no muffins, for this sage reason –
Muffs, and muffins too are not in season’ –

but there’s this bit here, got them dead to rights :

‘And yet the bakers (honest souls!) will cry,
We cannot help the bread from selling high;
Indeed they cry, and we do not tell you lies –
We sell our bread by statute of assize’.

Well Nixon’s – just down the street certainly won’t put their prices down – leastways not till the bread’s well stale.

‘Hatters have felt in the Long Vacation
The want of heads and want of occupation’
– you ask old John Stryche Palmer about that, he’s got that Hat and Cap warehouse – set up in 1810, and is in competition with John Constable further along the Cury.

Then a sudden cry stopped the butcher in his tracks

[ILLUSTRATION P108 Samuel Weldon, the butcher]

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Samuel Weldon, butcher, of Petty Cury broke off his poetic readings as a cry of pain came from the room above him. Leaving Pickwick to watch the shop he disappeared through a door at the rear and the murmur of voices could be heard from the bedroom where his wife lay in agony.

After a while he returned, muttered his thanks, but refused to divulge details of the illness, besides mentioning that he had consulted Dr Bond but that the only think that would now ease the pain was laudanum. This was itself a dangerous concoction and chemists were reluctant to supply it. Indeed there had been a court case only a week or so ago following the death of a young man who had gone into the shop of Mr Brewster druggist to purchase fourpennyworth of laudanum which he had refused to sell. Later the lad had gone into the Osborne Arms on Hills Road and called for a small quantity of gin and water saying he wanted to take some medicine in it. The landlady saw him took a phial from his pocket and mix the contents with the gin and water. Some time later he was seen to fall into a ditch in what appeared to be a state of intoxication A gentleman picked him out of the ditch but supposing him to be drunk left him beside the road. About eight o'clock he was still lying there and Thomas Brown of Clare College searched his pocket and found a bottle labelled "laudanum – poison". A policeman was sent for and he was conveyed to Addenbrooke's hospital. The remedies resorted to in the case of poison were tried but without success and he had died. When they examined the label on the bottle it appeared to come from Mr Clarke, chemist on St Andrew's street though he said such labels were commonly sold and had no recollection of selling it to the lad. The jury had returned a verdict of suicide and a warrant had been issued for the private internment of the deceased between 9 and 12 that same evening. He did not want that to happen to his wife – she was just 27 years old … but in such pain.

Once more Weldon reached for the relief of his volume of verse :

"Now where's the bit about butchers … ah yes.

'The Butcher too, don't look half so killing,
They don't re-veal it, although they're willing
To cut it just as fat, all prime and firm,
As they are wont to do when in full term: There is also a notice of the death of young Anne Weldon from the Cambridge Chronicle of 6th October 1838 – her suffering had not been much longer protracted
From full term prices won't abate a bob,
They make no difference 'twixt Gown and Snob'.

And nor we do – best meat in Cambridge (so they say) and I'll serve everybody – only sometimes I'd be pleased to serve anybody. Yet folk prefer to get their meat from the market stalls where its hanging about in the open air, covered in flies and dirt –well, being Saturday its market day – you'll see for yourself."

And as at that moment a renewed cry of pain came from the living room above the shop Pickwick took his leave. He entered Edward Wade's bookseller's shop and purchased his own copy of "Cambridge in the Long Vacation: poetically described, by Xtopher Twigum", which is here amongst his other papers. There is also a notice of the death of young Anne Weldon from the Cambridge Chronicle of 6th October 1838 – her suffering had not been much longer protracted.

[ILLUSTRATIONS : the titlepage of the volume of poetry, P109poem]

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As Pickwick continued down Petty Cury the street became crowded with stalls overflowing the main Market Place, and over all there hung a pungent pong of something distinctly unpleasant.

As he reached the edge of the Market Place he gazed around him. To his right there were lines of market stalls facing across towards Great St Mary's church, though his view of that building was obscured by a block of ancient buildings, shops below and dwellings above. He had expected Cambridge to have a large, spacious market place, not some cramped affair such as this

Ahead of him more stalls were crammed in the front of some sort of official building – in any other place it would have been a Town Hall, but already he was aware that Cambridge did things differently from most places. In front of this stood a decorative structure topped with a pineapple & protected by iron railings where people queued with buckets. And everywhere there was that unpleasant aroma

"Awful stink, is it not" enquired a young gentleman, noticing Pickwick's grimace. "You would hardly believe that it would be allowed in these enlightened time. Pleased to meet you, I'm sure – my name is Baldrey, I work as a clerk at Mortlock's bank in Bene't Street. I've just moved in to a house in Parson's Court, Wheeler Street - round the back there. I thought it would be a most pleasant place to live, what with the Botanical Garden just behind, but the stench is terrible. Several of us have complained – my friend – he works in Thomas Saunders' perfumers in Bene't street – can you imagine how it affects their trade – or perhaps its boosts their sales, who can tell

"You will have observed that this part of Cambridge is covered by butcher's stalls – this street to the left is called Butcher Row, and the one over there – and here he gestured to a lane running behind the official-looking building – is Short Butcher Row. Those premises on the corner are only ever used on Saturdays when about 12 butchers have their stalls here. Others have stalls in the street and some are attached to houses – "flap stalls" they call them.

But it's not the butchers' stalls that cause the problem. You see down there – pointing away from the Market towards St Andrews Hill – that street is Slaughter House Lane, and you can imagine what goes on there. Cattle are always being driven along there to their fate, you hear them all mooing and then the noise dies down – and then another lot are on the way. There is a stench of offal and decaying carcasses permeating the district and it is a constant attraction for the stray dogs from all around the area.

"What with the slaughterhouse behind me, and Bell's corn warehouse on the other side – no smell from that, but I will swear the street at night is alive with rats making their way from one to the other – well meat and corn is a fine combination – and of course there's always pools of water lying around on Market Hill, either sloshed from the buckets being filled up at that Conduit there – he pointed to the pineapple-topped structure just in front of them, or from the pumps in Pump Lane, or on Peas Hill

"But why talk of water, when the landlord's daughter is approaching?"

[ILLUSTRATION Market Hill from the corner of Petty Cury]

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Pickwick turned to greet a fair young lady who approached the Market from Petty Cury. "Take no notice of him sir, he does tease so, and anyway mother's given up the licence of the Red Cow for almost a year now. We've moved into a proper house in Wheeler Street, quite near Mr Wheeler's basket maker's shop. My father is a guard on the London and Cambridge mail coach and collects the banker's parcels from several of the banks – including Mortlock's – so that's how I met young Mr Baldrey – quite an sparking youth as you will have observed

"Every Saturday this area behind the Guildhall and out to Peas Hill is a vast outdoor display. Mr Johnson, the cooper in Wheeler Street puts out his hogshead, pipes, tubs and casks on the pavement opposite the shop for sale. In Parson's Court – or Ann's Yard as we call it – there are Mr Summer's tables, chairs and furniture – he is a fine cabinet maker indeed. Then Mr Clayton hangs fish outside his shop, together with hares and rabbits on sticks – there are vendors of sweetmeats and walnuts with trays hung around their necks.

"Peas Hill is equally crowded – earthenware on the pavements, corn and fish on stalls, shoes near St Edward's church. But old Mr Bleak the shoemaker who has a stall in the street where he works on weekdays has to move away on Saturdays to make way for the market stalls. Why there are always about 20 of them, some half on the road and half on the pavement. The main thing is the fish of all sorts, from sea and fen both. Quite why they sell fish on Peas Hill and peas here in front of the Town Hall – they call it the Green Market - I'm not sure

"It would all be quite fine but for the fellmonger – and especially that Mr Evans of Sawston and Thomas Smith of Saffron Walden. They go around all the butchers and buy up the skins, then they bring them to the end of Butcher Row and leave them in a pile till they're ready to cart them away. You'll see Mr William Vail collect the bullock and calf skins from the stalls with his wheelbarrow, or pull them along the street by hand – sometimes Mr Merry – he's an old soldier – adds to the pile

"The smell from those piles of skins is really offensive to us, but when we complain to the Market Committee about it they say nothing can be done, as its part of the Market. What they really mean is they're happy to charge them a toll, and that's more important that the inconvenience it causes those of us who have to live in the area".

Or indeed the other people who visit on Market day, thought Pickwick, as a warm breeze wafted another pungent odour in his direction

"But of course there's more rotten than just flesh in this part of Cambridge", chipped in Baldrey. "Ah yes", remembered Pickwick – "the apple-seller outside Mortlock's bank". At this the young man's demeanour changed in an instant, without a word he stalked off, leaving Pickwick and his young lady companion together in the street.

[ILLUSTRATION : map of the Guildhall area]

112

Pickwick’s discomfiture at finding himself alone and embarrassed with a young attractive woman on the corner of Petty Cury and Market Hill was compounded when he saw another lady approaching his direction.

Fortunately she had not noticed him, being greatly engaged in conversation with the man whose arm she was grasping in a vice-like grip. Pickwick instantly recognised laundrywoman Alice Bond and bargee Will Spread – who obviously had been unable to escape back to the safety of the fens before she had found him. Spread gave him a pitiful glance that seemed to beg some rescue from his predicament but Pickwick – being the gentleman he was - turned his back on both friend and market and dodged into Butcher Row, towards the smell that permeated the area.

There was a lane immediately on his right that led behind one apparent Town Hall and in front of another that stood seemingly subserviently behind it – why did Cambridge need two Town Halls, and why was one much grander than the other.

And who on earth was the figure in a three-cornered hat, resplendent in coat, knee-length breeches and stockings. One hand held a bell, the other a piece of rolled-up paper with which he was hitting at a small dog that snapped around his ankles.

"Get off, yer brute or I'll clout yer with me clapper" he snarled, at the same time aiming a kick at the animal's rear.

"Stop that at once Isaac Moule," remonstrated the landlady's daughter, who had followed Pickwick into the lane. At the sound of her voice the dog became docile and the bell-man blushed.

"I'm sorry, Miss Ann, but he will follow me everywhere." "You were pleased enough of his company in those long dark nights when you used to walk the streets assuring us that all was well – before the new police force was instituted."

"Ah but those days are gone now – do you know" – this to Pickwick – "I thought I'd lost the job together with all the other chopping and changing the new Town Council put in place. I heard that Ebeneezer Foster told them I should be dismissed, that there was no need for the job any more – but that was all put up by the new Town Clerk, Gunning. "Yes, Isaac, but you know everybody employed by the old council was turned out of their jobs and you would have got compensation". What – like Harris the old Town Clerk …

By now it was getting heated – this was interesting but not something to be discussed in the street. Pickwick interceded to ask just what was it that Isaac Moule did anyway

[PICTURE : Isaac Moule, bellman, with dog & Hobson's conduit]

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"Why", smiled Ann, "he is one of the most important men in all of Cambridge, are you not Isaac. You should have seen him that day when our new Queen, Victoria, was proclaimed. It was a grand procession - the Marshall on horseback, trumpets, all the chief of police on horseback, the Union Jack, a band of music, the Aldermen, Sergeants at Mace, the Town Clerk, Aldermen and Councillors – and Mr Isaac Moule, Town Crier. They made the proclamation on the site of the old Market Cross and in other parts of the town then it was back to the Town Hall for a fine feast of wine and cakes – you remember Isaac how you smuggled one of them out for me under your coat"

"Yes and it was all spoiled by Ebeneezer Foster, the Mayor – he was the reason very few people turned out to join in the celebrations. I know because I did the proclamation. I had to tell everybody that the Mayor would feel highly honoured by the attendance of any of the burgesses and inhabitants who might be pleased to join the procession. Well with the Mayor being Ebeneezer Foster there was no disposition on anybody's part merely to honour <u>him</u> and so most people stayed away!"

"Never mind, Isaac, you will be remembered long after Foster's name is forgotten, bank on that – unless you immortalise him in one of your fine Bellman's verses that you produce for us all at Christmas".

Isaac chuckled – "I got it right in 1829, didn't I – in my verse about the Common Council-men", and here he quoted:

"Ambitious men who seek no other praise
Than what attached to the honour lays,

Of being greater than their fellow men,
Because they're raised to office; when
Such men rule, we're not surprised to see
Their acts are acts of imbecility."

"Ah, but don't forget the other lines – the ones I told you to write", prompted Ann – and she added:

"Not such your councils, they are known to be,
The result of knowledge and integrity."

"Well I had to write that, didn't I, Sir, or I'd have been out of a job years ago", Isaac chuckled. "I took over as Bellman from Thomas Adams in 1820 and he'd always issued these Verses at Christmas as a way of earning a few extra coppers – in fact, to tell the truth that's his picture on the front of them, but we wear the same uniform and nobody notices. But doing the job I do I know everything that goes on in the council chamber and outside of it too – and I could tell you a tale or two if you've a mind to listen"

There was nothing Pickwick wished more.

[ILLUSTRATION : epilogue from Thomas Moule's Bellman's verse 1826 – prefer
ILLUS 2 :another extract from 1826]

114

Isaac Moule, bellman, started to explain the somewhat puzzling layout of the two civic buildings –one hidden from sight from the Market behind the other. Pickwick jotted down notes.

The building that fronted on to the Market Hill was the Shire Hall, built in 1747 for the use of the county and containing, on the upper floors two assize courts. Underneath was an open colonnade where market stalls used to be set up until 1835, when the front of the arches was bricked in and the area used for shops. The Town Council let the County have the site for a peppercorn rent, provided they had the use of the stalls and the cellars underneath.

Moule explained, "When the courts aren't in session the Town Council have the building for their business, and in return the County authorities can use the Cambridge Town Hall offices when they need them. That's why they put up a wooden bridge across Short Butcher Row to link the two.

"Now the Town Hall was the last building designed by a great Cambridge architect – James Essex. He started off as just a humble builder and joiner and rose to be one of the best architects of his day. Wherever you look you'll see his work. He restored the Cathedral at Ely and King's college chapel. He built Clare Hall chapel and did lots of other college work, including the court beside the river at Queens' college - along with their wooden "Mathematical" bridge. He had a thing about bridges –he built the one at Gerard's Hostel, that's just been replaced at great expense and more dispute – and the Great stone bridge opposite Magdalene college – only that's been replaced as well now by the new iron one. In fact, come to think of it, a lot of what he's done has now been done away with.

"He started on the Town Hall in 1782, it took two years to build and cost £2,500. It was opened on 25 May 1784 and Essex died on the 14th September. There's a fine Assembly Room inside and I'd like to think it will always be a reminder of a Cambridge man, through and through.

“But there’s a lot of talk about changing things round. Thomas Hallack’s got this idea of putting up a new assize court on the corner of Peas Hill. Other people talk about putting a Corn Market there – well we need one, you have to admit its not right to have the merchants standing about in all weathers when every other town has a covered building for them. The time’s appropriate now, following that fire we had in November 1836 when the old warehouse used by Marshalls & Bell burnt down. Everybody praised the way the Norwich Union engine was quick on the scene, followed by several of the other engines - but it was the number of university students who turned out that made all the difference. We weren’t so lucky the next year”

[PICTURES : 1 view from Market Hill showing the Shire Hall and, just visible to the right, behind it, part of James Essex’s Town Hall 2 2 Inside James Essex’s Town Hall]

115

Isaac Moule, Cambridge bellman started to relate a chapter of disasters in September 1837. "First there was a fire at Ebeneezer Foster's mercantile premises, Lt St Mary's Lane. It was used to store oil cakes and you can imagine the blaze that caused. The Sun fire engine got there quickly but soon all the warehouses in the yard were on fire, along with two cottages in Lt St Mary's Lane and both their roofs fell in. That caused all the other inhabitants to move their belongings out into the churchyard - it ended up looking like a furniture warehouse - especially with all the things from Foster and Coming's big houses - and then they complained that people hadn't taken enough care getting them out. The fire raged for an hour, threatening other houses, but fortunately was near to the river and there was plenty of water, so they put it out.

"Then two cottages belonging to Mr Collin, the timber merchant in a passage off Northampton Street were struck by lightning and set on fire. The electric fluid passed through the roof of one of the cottages, forcing in the ceiling of a cupboard. There was a coat hanging on the door which was burnt to ashes. It then passed out of the window and entered the lower window of the next house, set fire to a bed that was entirely consumed, shrivelled up a hat which was hanging over the bed, destroyed several articles of wearing apparel, and made a hole in a large copper boiler. Fortunately there were no persons in the room at the time or they must have been killed. The Norwich Union engine was quickly on the spot.

"I know because I was told to ring it by the curate of St Giles Parish. They wanted to collect £20 to help the three or families who had their houses stricken and their goods burnt and the father of a fourth family who was rushing to help the sufferers and fell off the roof of the house and broke his leg.

"It is essential we get some proper fire fighting arrangements. Perhaps they could set up a fund by voluntary subscription to clothe and payable men to work the engines. Let the engines and all the apparatus be duly inspected, and worked every six weeks, for which labour you'd pay men in cash, for loss of time. Then where their services are required at a fire they should be paid by the hour instead of giving them beer indiscriminately like they do now. If you've got them dressed alike in a jacket and a hat when refreshment is dished out why the working party can be easily identified - and it would stop all the hanger’s on claiming beer for themselves.

"Order and regularity are more essential at a fire than numbers left to themselves. I say divide the town into districts; elect from each several gentlemen and tradesmen who would serve the office of inspectors and conductors. For each engine appoint at least 20 active men, taking care that some of them are mechanics, as much time they probably be saved in getting the machine ready for work. The insurance companies would furnish a fair quantity of hose. Then

they ought to buy extra hose to supersede the present bucket system which is not always to be relied on. It's all very well saying how you could have a chain of men down to the river, passing buckets of water from hand to hand - but I've seen the fire buckets, and they've mostly got holes in them! But what really worries me is how easy it would be for all of the centre of Cambridge to be burnt down - it's just waiting to happen - come and I'll show you"

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Isaac Moule led Pickwick around to the front of the Shire Hall, facing the Market, and indicated the buildings on the right-hand side of Market Hill. He pointed out the fine shell-arch above one of the windows formerly home of one of the leading merchants years ago, and the building on the corner of Petty Cury, which had 300 years before been the home of the Veysey family, grocers. Inside there were marvellous stone fireplaces with his arms carved on them.

But it was the corner with Market Street that Moule was concerned about. “That is an area of really ancient properties with their old wooden beams and rafters, dry and inflammable, running back to Holy Trinity churchyard. Then you’ve got Warren and Baker on the one side with their tallow, fat, turpentine, oil and gunpowder, two spirit vaults, linen drapers and they like.

“And in the very middle is James and Edward Headley’s foundry – shut out from the street and all but inaccessible. It’s a proper nuisance to all who live around it, with the noise and the blacks off its fires. There’s an old lady, Mrs Brown, lives just next door to the new Cambridge Chronicle newspaper offices. Every night she looks out of her staircase window to make sure the foundry fires are shut down, and every night she scarce dares go to sleep in case they’re not. Can you imagine what would happen if the Headley foundry caught fire – the whole of central Cambridge would be razed to the ground.”

It was easy to echo his concern, for the area in front of the Shire Hall was crammed with buildings. To the left there were buildings right up against the walls of Great St Mary’s church – indeed he learned that if you chose the right pew in the church you could allow your gaze to wander away from the massive pulpit to the bedroom windows of a neighbouring dwelling.

Together they strolled down Warwick Street - a narrow lane lined on the left by The Grapes inn, Emmerson’s bakers and the other properties which backed onto the church. On the right was a shop which must be a mecca for every child, James Sharman’s toyshop, a fine rocking horse adorning its frontage. Beside it stood the pump which gave this passageway its alternative name.

Here they paused whilst Moule ruminated on the problems of water supply. There were, it appeared just a few such pumps to supply the public needs in the town centre, one in Peas Hill and another at Holy Trinity churchyard. The principal source however was be Hobson’s conduit – the structure with the pineapple on top which Pickwick had noticed. But this was often out of order and incapable of supplying the wants of the inhabitants of this part of the town. There was no actual shortage of water – streams of it ran away in different directions, but the Conduit itself would neither run, nor even drip. Something must be wrong either in the management or in the pipes. The most likely explanation was that the old leaden pipes were corroded by time – so why not have new iron pipes which would be more durable and cheaper. And assuming that new pipes must indeed be laid why not lay large ones and let those people living alongside them connect into them. And as it was downhill from the Market to the Great Bridge all that line of streets could be supplied at moderate charge – “Not

a bad idea is it – considering it comes from Thomas Hallack – if he gets his way he'll really shake the council up! It's high time something were done"

[ILLUSTRATIONS Market 1 : houses on the right-hand side of Market Hill, behind which was Headley's iron foundry
WARWICK : peeping into Warwick Lane, the toy warehouse on the right hand side; houses on the left backed up to Gt St Mary's church]

117

Pickwick and his guide, bellman Thomas Moule paused in their tour of Market Hill to gaze into the windows of White the bootmakers who had two shops facing each other across the narrow Pump Lane which ran in front of the East end of Gt St Mary's church. But it was at the last property that Moule stopped – that of James Wonfor. He related the hardship currently being experienced by the family. "This chap's brother, William, was in a good way till he went bankrupt at the end of last year. He had a fine house at Chesterton, well furnished with four poster bedsteads, Japanned wardrobe, mahogany dining and Pembroke tables, Damask sheets and four billiard table including one of Hunt's slate bottomed ones complete with balls. Mind you bankruptcy would be too good for another billiard chap I could mention" – "Not one John Brown?" ventured Pickwick and smiled at the response.

They turned right into St Mary's street. The street was narrowest on this corner, widening out as they walked towards Market Street. Pickwick's notebook contains the names of some of the shops. On the left hand side were John Dearle the baker, Miss Collin's habersdasher & Berlin wool depository; James Peter – watchmaker stood alongside George Purvis the bootmaker and Bacon the tobacconist on the corner of Rose Crescent.

Rose Crescent had recently seen extensive changes, like much of Cambridge it was quite modern. "This used to be the entrance to the Rose Tavern, one of Cambridge's famous inns, where Samuel Pepys used to drink. But it was all sold off in 1817 when it was falling down and a bit of a slum. The inn, yard, coach houses, stables and outhouses were bought by Charles Claydon, a butler of Trinity College who built this terrace of shops and houses in 1826. But he did keep one bit of the old inn – the balcony on the East side of Rose Crescent. They raised it up on scaffolding and build the new bit under it, for as it overhangs on to the street they would not have been allowed to replace it once it had been demolished

"As well as being a tavern the Rose was one of the best of the coffee house – on summer evenings when there were no fires in the college rooms many men will gather to read newspapers & partake of tea or coffee – or something stronger. Not that you can get much stronger than the coffee they drink - as hot as they can endure it, it is as black as soot and tastes not much unlike it - good they say for digestion and mirth"

In the early days – 1660s - when coffee houses first came in the University had tried to ban them. But as Christopher Wordsworth said in 1675 "to drink in taverns was scandalous, to be seen in an alehouse most unbeseeming, but to sit idling away their time in a coffee house … that employment is without the verge of reprehension".

"In Coffee houses the rich and the nearly penniless meet on something approaching equal footing;" said Moule, "my favourite was Turk's Head coffee house in Trinity Street, now Foster's bank.

"They are places where conversation is free, jokes saucy and scandals spread – have been for years. In fact you might find a little book of Cambridge coffee houses jokes if you look hard enough (though finding it is one thing, understanding it another – its another trying to appreciate the humour or understand the problems of earlier days).

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Standing with his back to Rose Crescent Pickwick gazed across the Market Hill to what he now knew to be the Shire Hall. He could not see all the front of that building for obscuring his view of the right-hand side of it were the fronts of old shops and houses whose back ways abutted on those of the properties in Warwick Street.

The buildings looked quaint, with their jetted fronts, overhanging gas lamps and protruding small-paned windows, but Isaac Moule seemed to have no love for them. In his view they were old, decrepit and in need of demolition. At least most of the shops now did have windows. Previously there were hatches on hinges, the lower part of which let down to form an counter and was supported on folding joints, or if these were worn on barrels, or posts or anything suitable height. The upper section was held up by iron hooks fastened to the projecting lower story of the shop, thus providing some protection from the elements. It was high time, in his opinion to clear them out

But this would involve an awful amount of debate and discussion, especially if the current dispute over Union Street was anything to go by

"Union street – that's the bit between the Market and Peas Hill. It's a narrow space, 40 yards long and just wide enough for two carriages to pass and on Saturdays it's encumbered by market people and their goods. The Paving Commissioners decided it would make more sense to pull down the properties on the west side and widen it – they thought they could get more market stalls in and make more revenue.

"Mr Salmon, a draper, had traded from a shop there for 40 years, and had decided the time had come to rebuild his property. So he transferred the business to Mr Wallis's shop near by and got permission to demolish the old building. No sooner had he pulled it down than the Paving Commissioners decided that they would take the site to widen the road – and only pay him the value of the plot. Of course Salmon wasn't going to stand for that and he got his builder, William Peck, to put up scaffolding and start building as quick as he could, and he instructed a Counsel to take up his case

Now they knew they'd have to pay him some compensation and the lawyers started arguing. The Commissioners wanted to offer him a sum based just on the old shop, not the new one he'd have put up if they delayed. But nobody could be sure just how much it should be.

Then Pryme pointed out that as well as the value of the property there was another charge for the loss of goodwill. He cited the case of Lord Braybrooke of Saffron Walden who was granted £20,000 in consideration of the new railway passing through his park, in addition to the value of the land.

"Until the Commissioners knew the sum, they couldn't be sure if they could afford to pay it. To make matters worse the Vice Chancellor – and Mayor Charles Humfrey – were sure that they'd already spent all the money they'd be granted under the two Improvement Acts, and didn't have authority to raise extra taxes except for normal day-by-day expenses. It was a real mess so they decided to appoint a committee. Thomas Hallack said he'd be pleased to offer his services – at which Humfrey the Mayor told him he was sure the legal gents could do the better without his help – there's no love lost between the two of them!

[ILLUSTRATION Market Hill; Union Street was the old name for the area from Market Hill to Peas Hill, its entrance shown on the left beyond the tall buildings which stood beside Shire Hall]

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Isacc Moule continued to relate the debate then going on about proposals to widen Union Street, from the Market to Peas Hills.

"Faced with the legal challenge from Salmon, who said they had given him permission to demolish his old shop and then tried to commandeer the vacant site, the Improvement Commissioners had to decide what to do. Hallack was sure they were in the right and the lawyers were wrong but Mayor Humfrey jeered and laughed at him and insisted they go to law to decide whether they had the rights to raise the money to pay compensation. At the same time they decided to call a jury to assess what the sum ought to be, in case they got permission. All of this was adding to the costs of the affair.

"It was just a couple of weeks ago that the jury assembled at Shire Hall – the largest and most respectful gathering of county yeomanry seen for many a year. But neither of the lawyers for the two parties were there, both delayed at a court case in Huntingdon and they had to rely on others who had not been properly briefed.

"Well the jury interviewed all sorts of people – Oliver a wholesale draper from London who had supplied Salmon for 30 years, James Sharman who had the property next door, Peck the builder who told them that the new place would be worth £7-800, Wentworth and Holingsworth the auctioneers who both said the value of the property was £2,400

"It took the jury all day to consider and it was not till nearly midnight that they reached their judgement. The came in with a figure of nearly £3,500 for Salmon, and another £1,500 for compensation to Trinity Hall and Corpus Christ colleges. It's far more than the Commissioner's had bargained on, so what will happen I can't say. Doubtless we shall see a vacant building plot standing in the centre of town for several months yet, doing no good to anybody, while they talk about it – and they're the Commissioners who were set up because the Town Council was so inefficient!

Mind you now the Town Council have plans to change the layout of the market stalls. They already moved them round to give more room beside the conduit and in the green market and talk about a butter market area that could be covered with an awning. They thought if the stalls were covered it would give a more handsome appearance and they could charge more for them: they want those on the Green Market to pay a penny for each yard frontage of their stalls. But Ebeneezer Foster thinks that's not lawful and so the council have had to pay out again for more legal opinion before they take any action.

They've had 80 new double stalls made up for the meat market – so two occupy the same space that one person does. And of course they've put the rents up to 2s. a week. They also want the butchers to clear their stalls by 10 on Saturday night – otherwise it encourages them to sell unwholesome meat. Well with the stench that always hangs around who's going to notice a bit more smell.

And you should hear what Hunt – clerk of the market – thinks."

[PICTURE : looking across Market Hill from Rose Crescent – showing a solitary market stall]

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Isaac Moule, Cambridge bellman, had an intimate knowledge of council affairs and obviously had the ear of various of the council's employees. It began to become clear that all was not

well within Cambridge local government. The Clerk of the Market – whose name, Pickwick noted, was Hunt – was fuming, even though he'd been granted a large pay rise as Moule explained.

"A few years ago Town council used to pay him just £10 a year salary, but they allowed him to have seven stalls which he could let and take the profit – which brought in another £70. But under the new arrangements this is not allowed, so he gets a salary of £50 instead. But the council have also appointed six men to put stalls up, take them down and look after them. They have to have the stalls clear by Sunday morning, no matter how late the market trades Saturday night.

"All the other effects of council reorganisation are causing tremendous upset – and the old Town Clerk is still seeking what he considers proper compensation after he was sacked – but you wouldn't be interested in things like that …"

Ah, but he would, but first Pickwick sought further information about the story of the strange structure with the pineapple on top – Hobson's Conduit. This puzzled Isaac somewhat – it had been there since before his time. He knew that the water which was supposed to issue from it came down channels along the street from a series of nine wells somewhere out near Shelford. It ran along the side of the road from Trumpington to the end of Downing terrace, where it split into two parts. One continued down both sides of Trumpington street to Pembroke college – where it disappeared. The other flowed along Downing Terrace and down both sides of Regent Street until it disappeared opposite Christ's college. The water then appeared again at the Conduit on the market – or it was supposed to.

"Some say that about the only time it works properly is when some King comes visiting – and then it doesn't run with water, it runs with wine. Otherwise it's a constant drain on cash to maintain it – including the rents of two of the houses in Union Street, which Edward Potto left years ago. Mind you if they pull them down for the street widening …"

As for the history of the scheme, Moule was less sure – it all happened over 200 years earlier - though as far as he knew it the idea had been to divert a stream of water into the town to clean out the old King's Ditch – which then was poisoning the air of Cambridge with its stench – much like the skins did now. Even then there was controversy.

"See the Royal coats of arms on the top, well they were put there to commemorate the restoration of the monarchy in 1661 – but then the council changed it's mind, because they were worried about the cost, and then changed it back again. Mind you council were in a difficult state because the town had backed Cromwell during the Civil War whereas the University had supported the King, and had even awarded his son Prince Charles a degree when he was only eleven years old. Then when that lad became Charles II he was always travelling about the area for the horseracing in Newmarket and I suspect the council never knew if he would come to Cambridge and wanted to keep in with him. Not like Thomas Hobson, he didn't mind who he upset"

[ILLUSTRATION : Hobson's Conduit on Market Hill]

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Pickwick of course knew something of the fame of Hobson, the Cambridge carrier, though Isaac Moule seemed less impressed with the man's reputation.

"His name is connected with the conduit, but he was only one of a group of people actually involved – and I reckon he was motivated by his own interest. You see he used to keep his nags in a stable where St Catharine's college chapel now stands, and one thing a horsekeeper

needs is water. A horse drinks 6-8 gallons of water a day, and you need water for mucking out the stables. The channel along Trumpington street ran right past his door – would have saved him a lot of carting. The actual idea for the work came from Dr Perne, University vice-chancellor who was worried about the plague at the time – we're talking now about 1574. It seems some thought the infection was brought to Cambridge on the clothing of a chap who'd come to Midsummer Fair from London and died of the plague in Barnwell. But there was also the stench from the King's Ditch …"

The what? Pickwick enquired. "The ditch that was dug by King John around the outside of the town and fortified by Henry III when they feared the ruffians from the Isle of Ely would attack in the 1200s. It left the river near Magdalene bridge, runs behind Sidney street– where Wall's Lane (Hobson Street) is now - and crossed over behind the Lion hotel yard. That's why all the slaughterhouses were established just there – they could throw the bones and rubbish into the ditch. It went out to the river again near Silver street. Well they thought if they diverted water down the old ditch it would help to clean it out.

"The cost of it was borne out of public subscription – it's not as if Hobson actually spent much of his own money, at least not on this. Mind you he had plenty – made his money as official University letter-carrier using the old four-wheeled waggons he inherited from his father. He also carted trunks and books for the students and fen fish for the Royal household. And of course he hired out horses. He had this way of putting every horse, after its had been out, into the farthest stall, and gradually move it down as other jaded brutes came in, so by the time it got nearest the door it was the freshest horse to be had. And nobody could bully him into changing his system – no matter if you wanted a fast horse to get to Newmarket or a steady nag for an afternoon trot you had what he gave you, and no other. It wouldn't work today – let old Jordan try that game and he'd soon find his custom had passed to Baxter, Pratt or one of the other livery stable keepers.

But it was when he died that Hobson really became famous – and that was down to the plague which had broken out in London. Nobody was allowed to travel there and Hobson couldn't bear being idle and died. John Milton wrote a poem about him : "Here lies old Hobson, Death hath broke his girt, And here, alas, hath laid him in the dirt … And surely, Death could never have prevail'd, Had not his weekly cours of carriage fail'd".

Mind you Hobson left immense monies to charity – he owned various manors, including the Denny Abbey estate. He endowed the Spinning House as a workhouse for beggars so that they should have some employment – and as a House of Correction for unruly and stubborn rogues – he'd turn in his grave if he could see what goes on there now."

[ILLUSTRATIONS HOBSON – a waggon approaches Cambridge in Hobson's time
CORPUS : King's Parade., Hobson's stables used to be on the left
PORT : portrait of Thomas Hobson on horseback]

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The mere mention of the words "Spinning House" brought an immediate change to the fair countenance of the young woman, Ann Smith, who had quietly followed Pickwick and the bellman, listening intently to everything Isaac had said. This was obviously not something to be discussed in the presence of a lady, even one such as the landlady's daughter of the Red Cow

Pickwick suggested that it might be time for a cup of that fine coffee that Moule had mentioned. If he had expected to be led to some characterful coffee house however he was to be disappointed.

Isaac led them along St Mary's street to Senate House Hill, then left along King's Parade. The new screen in front of the college gleamed clean and bright in the sunshine and, despite his dislike of modern architecture, Pickwick could not fail to be impressed with the spires and turrets which seemed to mirror those of the chapel itself, especially when reflected and distorted in the windows of the shops opposite.

But then his eye was caught by an image of the college actually in the window of one of the shops. He noted its name, Robert Roe, printseller, and resolved to return.

Moule led them across the street and towards a large, brand-new, building with carriage entrances at either end and a fine stone doorway in the middle, above which were carved the words "Crisford, Bull Hotel"

"Stephen Crisford's a friend of mine", announced the bellman. "He's put a lot into this hotel – it used to be called the Black Bull before he commissioned James Wattes to rebuilt it – it only opened a few weeks ago. He's had every convenience built in, got warm, cold and shower baths adjoining the bed chambers, and hopes he can attract the nobility and gentry to patronise him when they come up to Cambridge. The real test will be in a few weeks when the University gentlemen come back. That can be a worrying time for tradesmen, and a worrying time for townsmen too – especially when they have such attractive companions as Ann here"

Ann meanwhile seemed deep in her own thoughts and refused to rise to her companion's comments.

Settled in comfortable armchairs with a cup of hot steaming, strong coffee, Pickwick began to learn of the tortuous state of Cambridge local government. Cambridge had had a town council for hundreds of years and had been in dispute with the university for nearly as long. Powers which elsewhere would have been vested in the corporation were in Cambridge wielded by the university who seemed to gain the upper hand in any dispute, aided by their influence in the wider affairs of the nation. It was always of the University that any monarch thought first, for it was the University that provided the priests and teachers, and indeed endeavoured to cram a modicum of knowledge into monarch's own offspring.

But any attempts by the town to remedy such affairs were rendered ineffectual by their own nefficiency and corruption. And the name that stood out most was that of John Mortlock.

[Pictures : "BULL" print with is Crosford]

Isaac Moule began his sketch of the genealogy of the Mortlock family who had run Cambridge for generations.

“The Mortlock’s made their money in the wool trade and consolidated it with marriages. When the first John Mortlock died in 1754 he’d seen one of his daughters married off to the master of Clare Hall, another had been left a considerable fortune by a tutor of Queens’ and a third married a fellow of Caius college, chap named Davy. It was his sister, Sarah, who married Mortlock’s son – the second John Mortlock.

“Now this second John built up a large fortune in the woollen drapery business with a shop near the Rose Inn. He and Sarah grew a fine family of five good-looking daughters and one son. And guess what he named him – John! And guess what John III did – he married the only child and heiress of a wealth Presbyterian grocer, Stephen Harrison, and started a large family of his own – ten of them

“With all that money behind him John III decided to extend his influence. In 1778 he spend some of his money on buying himself the freedom of the borough of Cambridge and so became one of the 180 burgesses – very good for business, since it gave him a lot of influence. He then got himself elected one of the 24 common councilmen and two years later was made one of the twelve Aldermen. A remarkable rise to power, some thought too fast.

JOHN MORTLOCK 1756–1816 BANKER
MAYOR OF CAMBRIDGE THIRTEEN TIMES
Painted by John Downman ARA

Then in 1780 he set himself up as a banker – the first one in Cambridge - lending money to other tradesmen and to country squires. He bought what was left of the old Austin friars house from the University, and build himself a fine new house and bank on the corner of Peas Hill and Bene’t street.

He used his money to support candidates in the election in opposition to the established power-broker, Philip Yorke, Lord Hardwicke. Hardwicke was everything – squire of Wimpole, Lord Lieutenant of the county, Chancellor of the University – and the two candidates he nominated were always the two who got elected to parliament. The Cambridge dissenting interest, into which John had married, were fed up with being outvoted at every parliamentary election by the non-resident voters brought in by Hardwicke from London and everywhere else. They wanted change.

“You’ve heard of the Marquess of Granby – and seen his picture on dozens of inn signs. Well his son, Charles Manners, married the heiress of Cheveley and got himself elected to parliament for the county. The when his grandfather died he became the Duke of Rutland.

“He enlisted Mortlock’s help to get his own brother elected MP in his stead. To cut a long story short, Rutland’s brother got in and a short time afterwards Mortlock was appointed Receiver General of the Land Tax – which involved the control and without payment of interest of thousands of pounds on their way from the pockets of the landlords to the Treasury. Mortlock soon became so wealthy he was able to buy the manors of Gt & Lt Abington to add to his estates at Hildersham, Toft and Pampisford, but he also made himself enemies. Now he was ready for the next step.

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Isaac Moule described how John Mortlock now decided to set up a club ostensibly for Cambridge aldermen – but really intended to promote the interest of his new powerful friend the Duke of Rutland in his fight against his political rival Lord Hardwicke of Wimpole Hall.

"The club needed somewhere central to meet so they chose the Eagle Inn in Bene't Street – nearly opposite Mortlock's Bank. They had a fine time– all they could drink, all they could eat, and never a penny to pay for it – it was all financed by the Duke of Rutland, so of course everybody was keen to keep in with him and agree to anything he wanted done.

"Now Mortlock decided it was time he got himself elected one of the two Members of Parliament for Cambridge. William Pitt the Prime Minister had decided to call an election and Mortlock got his name put forward against one of the sitting MPs, Parker Hammond. He was astute enough to see how the ground lay and knew he'd no chance against this new banker-friend of Rutland's, so he stood down – and John Mortlock was elected unopposed.

"There was only one snag – he'd had to give up the remunerative post of collector of Land tax, but he made sure it went to his banking assistant, Samuel Francis; and this upset another of his old friends, John Purchas who turned against him.

"Once John Mortlock was away in London his enemies started trying to bring down his bank, spreading rumours and scandals about him. You see banking depends on the good name of the bank owner and if people lost confidence with one banker they'd take out all their money and put it with another. Mortlock was safe when he was the only banker in town, but now others had been set up.

"Old Mortlock was sharp enough for them though. He was related to most of the big names in the area, including the Bishop of Lincoln who was his son in law. So he got the Bishop to come down to Cambridge. You should have seen it. There at the back of the bank were all the anxious clerks and tellers, there at the front were crowds of greasy bawling glaziers and market women and godless gownsmen struggling to get to the bank counter to get their money before it all ran out. And there in between sat the Bishop of Lincoln perched on a stool, complete in all his gear – wig, silk apron and shovel hat, brandishing banknotes in one hand and a small hand scuttle full of sovereigns in the other! Well if that didn't show how strong the bank was, nothing would.

"And Mortlock was too rich by now anyway – they say he owned property worth at least £30,000. He had a reputation for financial honesty and no-one could doubt he was a fine businessman. What's more he was an alderman of Cambridge and an MP – he was set up for life – or would have been apart from the political scandal."

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Seated in some comfort in the Bull Hotel, King's Parade, Isaac Moule continued the story of the Mortlock dynasty

"By the time he was 29 the boy-banker young John Mortlock had been elected MP for Cambridge; next year he further strengthened his powers by being elected Mayor of Cambridge and strengthened the power of Mayor by changing the rules over how they were

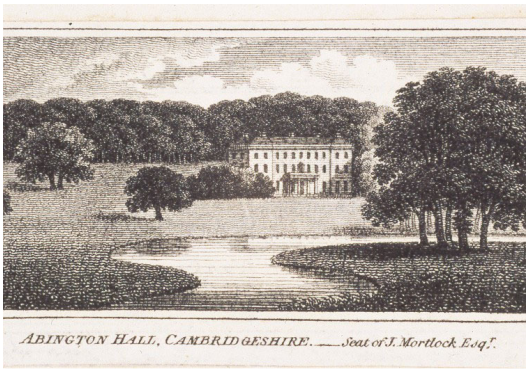
elected. The opposition were against it, but they were heavily outnumbered. There was court-case after court case but with the backing of the Duke of Rutland – and being related to so many big-wigs - he always won. Then he got himself elected Recorder of Cambridge – a position normally held by some noble outsider.

"But then Mortlock was caught altering names on the lists of land-tax commissioners for Cambridge – it was there in black-and-white in his own handwriting, how he'd changed the spelling of some of them and added others to suit his own cause. There was a big enquiry and he was ordered to be in the House of Commons while Parliament passed a resolution saying what he'd done had been 'highly criminal and a breach of the privileges of the House'.

"He'd also been flirting with the opposition party, saying the wrong things and upsetting his own side – so much so that even his friend the Duke of Rutland accused him of mismanagement. Mortlock could see he was in an impossible position, he had no choice but to resign his seat in 1788 and come back to Cambridge under a cloud.

"Cambridge still belonged to Mortlock. For year after year he was either Mayor or deputy Mayor, and when he wasn't his banking partner Samuel Francis or his son was. The Council may have been weak but John Mortlock wasn't.

"Many remembered how during the war against Napoleon starving people had seized one of the barges loaded with flour at Foster's mill and started dividing it up amongst themselves. The Magistrates were soon on the scene but it was Mortlock who took the initiative and bought the load himself, getting it taken to the town hall so it could be divided amongst the poor people. Then when there were more riots over the price of meat being sold on the market it was Mortlock who rode out into the mob and brought them to their senses.



"Throughout that terrible time Mortlock continued with his banking business, surviving the various recessions and by the time it ended he'd made a vast fortune – enough to buy Abington Hall and its estate.

"By now John Mortlock was over 60 years of age, and he was getting frail. He started to give some thoughts to what would happen after he died. He'd got seven sons and you'd have thought the oldest would have got everything – but that was not to be. He handed all his lands and estates to his second son, Thomas, a fellow of St John's college and a stuffy bachelor. Mortlock hoped that it would keep this separate from his banking business and out of the hands of his eldest son, John Cheetham Mortlock – cheat'em seems an appropriate name in view of what happened next!"

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Having assured himself that his private estates would be safe by giving them to his second son, Thomas, John Mortlock now turned his attention to his banking business, as Isaac Moule related.

"He took his eldest son – John Cheetham Mortlock into partnership, as everybody thought he would. Well the lad had taken over from his dad in the Mayor's chair, was a commissioner of excise and well respected in the banking world – too much so, as we shall see!

"Then he brought his third son in on the business too. Now Frederick Cheetham Mortlock was a different case altogether. He lacked any feeling for making money, he preferred hunting

and the leisured occupations of a country gentleman – which of course he was. And he'd blotted his copybook by eloping to Gretna Green with the beautiful Sarah – daughter of Finch the ironmonger of Market Hill, who lived at the Manor House in Lt Shelford. Mind you I think old John had forgiven him by this time, perhaps he never thought the lad would never have had it in him.

"So now it was Mortlock and Sons bank. But not for long. John Cheetham had been active in the brewing business of Stewarts of Norwich but otherwise they were told not to start up any other business within fifty miles of Cambridge. But John Cheetham was not having any of that – he went off and started a rival bank of his own, just down Trinity Street. When his father died it was John Cheetham Mortlock who became the big man in the area, got elected mayor and then surpassed anything his father achieved by getting himself knighted.

"So that left the Mortlock bank in the hands of Frederick, and he was soon in trouble. It was his oldest brother who was getting all the attention, and attracting all the banking business which everybody knew Frederick was not interested in. But he could not afford to let the bank fail, and he had a large family to keep in the style to which they had become accustomed. So Frederick had no choice but to go begging to his older brother Thomas – the one who had been willed all the lands and most of the money.

Thomas Mortlock

"Now Thomas, you'll remember was a stuffy old bachelor don of St John's college and had no time for the extravagant, pleasure loving, Frederick who'd run up large debts everywhere – couldn't bear the sight of him. But he was appalled at the way the family business was being made a mess of and coveted the idea of being a banker himself. So he went into partnership on the understanding that as soon as was appropriate Frederick would drop out. And so it happened. Thomas Mortlock found himself possessed of everything – Abington Hall, the house and bank in Bene't street, the banking business – and his free meals at St John's college too! And even better, he'd taken full advantage of the failings of his wayward brother!

"Frederick went off to live in Leicestershire with the beautiful Sarah, to indulge in hunting and shooting and rearing his large family which included his first-born son. And guess what he called him – John Frederick Mortlock. He was the apple of his father's eye – and it's him who sells the apples outside the Mortlock bank to this day!"

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Pickwick's notebook contains copious details of the affairs of the Mortlock family which Isaac Moule imparted in the Bull Hotel. But there is something more – a pamphlet entitled "A short sketch of the history of John F. Mortlock and the cruel treatment he has received from his relations which has compelled him to embrace his present humble mode of obtaining his bread".

How was it that the dirty linen of such an important banking family could have been so laundered in public? What scandals must it have caused, and how many tongues wagged over its details.

John Frederick Mortlock was the son of Frederick who had made such a mess of the banking empire he'd inherited that he'd handed it over to his elder brother, Thomas, before it was entirely squandered – or at least that was how Moule had represented it.

The lad himself clearly viewed his uncle as the villain of the piece, as his pamphlet relates : "my uncle Thomas, caused my father under one pretence or another to resign the entire management of the property and business into his sole hands and leave Cambridge for Leicestershire".

John had wanted to join the navy, but his family favoured the church – an option he was totally opposed to. He attended a school in Peterborough kept by one Mr Garbett "who was generally very unpopular, and particularly so with me" and at the age of 18 "I was so naughty as to run away – this is one of my greatest crimes". He was then placed with a Mr Holmes, formerly tutor at Queen's college, then holding a curacy at Croxton and eking out his living by taking four pupils at £200 each a year. John got on well with this learned man who, considering he'd hitherto spent but a monkish, scholastic life, he found quite enjoyable and quite able to overlook the foibles of youth.

But then John's "ardent temperament was too susceptible of the attractions which the fair sex have always presented to me" and he was hastily removed from Croxton and sent to another tutor in Buckinghamshire where he lasted just three months before repeating the experience and being turned out again.

At least now he could embrace his love of the sea, becoming an infantry cadet in the East India Company, sailing to Calcutta and down the Ganges, where he witnessed an awful sight. "We had not left Calcutta more than twenty days when as he was bathing, my companion was taken away by an immense crocodile, and devoured; the ferocious animal seized him in his huge jaws, and disappeared with him from our sight under the water". It was not only the wildlife which distressed him for "the noxious effects of the climate upon my frame became so apparent and alarming that the medical man declared if I remained in India, I could not live longer than a twelvemonth".

John returned to England to find his parents had separated and his father had no time for him. He was sent to his uncle Thomas, the banker "who took literally no notice of me, neither did any of my relations". He remained at an inn ten days when with wounded feeling, very wretched health, and with little more than £100 to his name, he set off for London.

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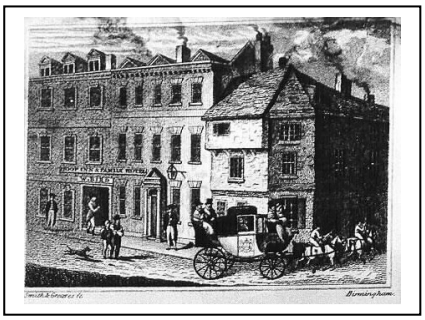

John Frederick Mortlock, spurned by his own family and his wicked uncle, tried to plead his case with more distant relations but none would acknowledge his existence. He tried to eke out his meagre savings by living on the Continent, even returning to India, constantly investing in letters which were not replied to.

Then in 1833 he returned to Cambridge and found a sympathetic hearer in the person of Mr Ekin, landlord of the Hoop Hotel, with whom he resided for six months. Perhaps mused Pickwick young Mortlock might have succeeded Jemmy Gordon as the resident inn character, well able to interest, amuse - or bore - those passengers who paused there awhile before continuing their stagecoach journeys. Perhaps too Mr Ekins, knowing the lad's connection with two of the major Cambridge banks might have had other motives. If so nothing came of it.

At the end of six months John's welcome was wearing thin, and his bill still unpaid. He determined to do something to bring his grievances to a wider public, and perhaps force his family to take him once more under their wing. He recorded his plan in his pamphlet.

'I determined to commit some trifling breach of the law, that I might be taken into custody, be tried at the sessions, and expose the conduct of my relatives; accordingly I broke some of the windows of my uncle's bank, and was apprehended. But, contrary to my desire, it was treated as a foolish frolic and I was discharged without hearing what I had to say; so there I was, worse off than before, with the stigma of a silly attack upon the house of my relative resting upon me, and this they used to their own advantage'.

But his ploy did have some result for the next morning uncle Mortlock, the banker, send his head clerk to the lad, proffering a ten pound note on condition John left Cambridge and went back to London. It was too good an offer to refuse. John discharged some of his debts - though not to the kind landlord of the Hoop - and with half the cash in his pocket set off once more. Three weeks later he was nearly broke and wrote once more to his uncle.

This time he was more successful. Back came a letter from Mr Randall, the solicitor, promising a whole guinea every week for six months on one condition - he was to keep well away from Cambridge. If he returned he would be locked up!

John's reaction was predictable: 'If the last threat had not been made use of I should have been glad to accept the guinea a week; but as it was, I hastened to Cambridge that same day, and immediately left a note at Mr Randall's house informing him where I was to be found'. He had called their bluff!

But you do not try and bully a banker. At midnight two constables arrested him and took him to the Eagle Inn where Alderman Abbott accused him of writing threatening letters to his uncle - though no letters were ever produced. He was flung into the Cambridge town gaol, across Parker's Piece, and next day sentenced to two years imprisonment unless or until he could find a total of £400 sureties that he would keep the peace and not annoy his kindly uncle, who had, after all, been so generous with his funding.

As John lamented: 'No doubt his was a commodious method of getting rid of a relative who had become obnoxious on account of his poverty; but was it kind?, was it just; was it not rather the exertion of arbitrary tyrannical power over a defenceless object'.

Perhaps, though Pickwick, but it was an excellent way of removing a troublemaker.

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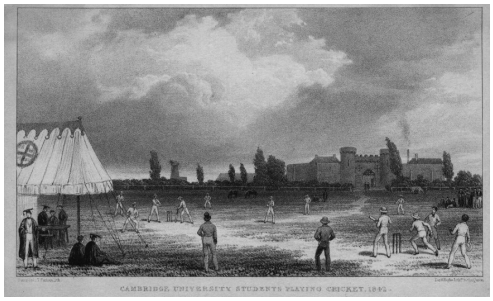

The gaol overlooking Parker's Piece in which John Frederick Mortlock found himself incarcerated was not to his liking at all – but, remarked Isaac Moule it was far better than the old one – and the one before that.

"When I was a lad the Town Gaol stood next to the Town Hall and was a most shocking place. In those days the gaoler, John Doggett, had a little perk – he was allowed to sell ale to the prisoners, and I have heard how the old Town Crier, Horner Johnson, had a little perk too – you know the Spinning House, where the University imprison lewd women" – "ah", thought Pickwick, "that's what goes on there" – "well the crier used to call around and visit the ladies of pleasure imprisoned there with his whip – ten shillings he'd get for whipping ten women!

“Then in 1788 they built a new gaol and demolished the old Tollbooth –they reused some of the masonry in the Town Arms in Butter Row. The new gaol was a commodious brick structure built at the back of the Spinning House, in Malting House Lane and overlooking the open fields. It cost the town over £900 to erect, but it weren’t long before they were building another one. But as this was on common land the council had to go to the expense of getting an Act of Parliament, then what with the fees to the architect William McIntosh Brookes it cost them nearly £25,000. But then they have to pay towards the upkeep of the county gaol on Castle Hill as well! Needless to say it takes up not a little council business over the expenses”

With all that expenditure the Parker’s Piece gaol ought to be luxurious enough. It had provision for 50 inmates with eight yards, eight day rooms, and, for hard cases, a solitary cell.

“Those who behave themselves and work on the treadmills – 20 minutes work, 10 minutes rest for nine hours a day - are rewarded with 2½ lb of best white bread and a pint of table beer every day; they have salt and warm water with their bread and on Saturdays are allowed cheese and onions. Those who won’t work don’t get the beer nor so much bread”.

However it did not suit the banker’s son and within three months Mortlock contrived to escape. He ran down to London, but was soon back again – this time as an escaped prisoner and in worse state than before as he recorded in his pamphlet. “I was shut up with no associates but men of the most abandoned character whose company it was impossible to avoid, as they were in the same apartments as me; with nothing but bread and water for my food and with only some straw and a couple of blankets for my bed when locked up at night in the cell. Before, I had received a little better treatment, but now I was used the same as the most abandoned villain who might chance to be thrown into prison”.

It was something he would have to get used to, for he was now sentenced to two years imprisonment. Unless of course he could find someone to put up some money for bail.

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John Mortlock had one friend in the world, but needed two if he was to be released from Cambridge gaol. His friend was willing to put up £100 to bail him out but, although his uncle had a bank-full of money there would be no handouts from him to find the second surety. John owed money everywhere, but nowhere more than to the landlord of the Hoop Hotel where his bill for six months lodgings still remained unpaid. Yet remarkably it was the landlord Mr Ekin who put up the remaining cash. Just what tales of his harsh and cruel uncle had the lad spun, Pickwick wondered.

Mortlock set off to find his father in France, begging a passage on a steam boat. His dad was most upset to hear his story – how could anybody have acted in the way they did – to put up good money to release the good-for-nothing lad from his proper place in prison. And no he would not pay for his journey home, the boy would have sell the clothes of his back to raise the cash – which was what he did.

Yet if his father refused him the wicked uncle came once more to the rescue with a weekly stipend of sixteen shillings to be collected from an ironmonger’s shop in London. Soon however John was back in Cambridge living in the house of William Lavercombe, former head waiter at the Hoop who now had a shop in Bridge street. But this time he had to pay his rent, receiving his cash each Monday morning from his grandfather’s servant.

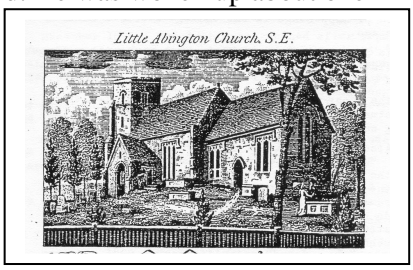
No member of the family would take any notice of him, regarding him as a walking pestilence and spreading what John considered deliberate untruths – how he could have been a college

fellow, a prodigy of learning and genius, a bishop or indeed an Archbishop had he not indulged himself in scandalous conduct and brought the family name into disrepute.

With such a character it was unsurprising that nobody would offer him employment. He made his way once more to London, then Paris and almost America before, like the proverbial bad penny turning up again at the banker's door in August 1835. Finding this once more shut against him he hired a stall and a small tent and set them up opposite the door of Mortlock's bank in Peas Hill. The stall bore a large sign "Apple stall kept by Mr Mortlock" and there he passed the day clad in a magnificent velvet lined coat, books on the table before him and a silver salver for donations at his side. Money poured in, companions joined him in his vigil and every time Mr Mortlock the banker entered or left his place of business, or even appeared momentarily at the window, Mortlock the apple-seller and his cronies let out a howl of abuse.

Soon however things became much more serious, as Isaac Moule explained.

"It was the November of 1836 when it happened. Banker Thomas Mortlock had gone to his home at Lt Abington – a low thatched cottage with a farmyard. He was woken up about one o'clock in the morning by an alarm of fire from the stackyard. When he went into his dressing room he noticed that the window had been broken and the room set on fire – it had burned the chintz curtains and part of a looking glass but then gone out. Then they noticed how one of the ladders that had been left beside a hay stack had been moved – somebody had taken it to get up to the bedroom window.



Well it was obvious to everybody who'd done it. John Mortlock had been heard moaning about his uncle dozens of times and John Hart, stationer and bookseller in Peas Hill had heard him say 'as true as there is a God in heaven, I will take the life of my uncle Thomas, for which I believe the Lord will forgive me, as I conceive it is to him I owe my present distressed state'. And what's more he was seen in the area."

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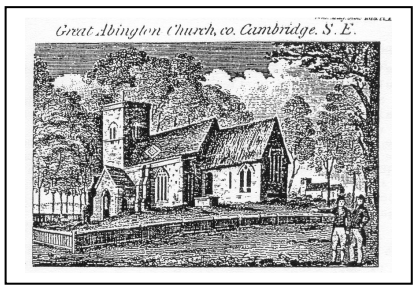
Pickwick had little appreciation of the landscape of Cambridgeshire but it appeared there were two adjacent villages of Great and Little Abington. They must be quiet places for numerous people came forward to testify to having spotted a stranger in the area around the 10th November 1836, when the fire took place, as Moule explained

"The first witness they called was William Speed, gamekeeper to Mr Norris. Well he knew John Mortlock and met him a week or so before the fire and how he'd been wearing a black hat with round crown & wide brim - one we call "wide awakes" - they're very common, the boys wear them in the fields. But Mortlock also had a green rusty velvet shooting jacket, high shoe leggings and low shoes and no tongue from the gaiters over the shoes.

George Downing keeps a beer house at Ickleton and told how this chap had come there about 8 o'clock asking about the Mortlock family - and he was wearing that dark round hat, dark velveteen frock and shoes had once been high once but the tops were cut off; he said that he appeared in reduced circumstances. Well Mortlock had admitted it was him

John Speed lives at Hinxton, on the morning of 10th November he and Henry Kefford both saw the same person on Abington hill and spoke to him. Andrew Ison, blacksmith at Lt Abington saw him coming out of Mrs Elizabeth Thompson's shop and she told how he'd bought two pennyworth of bread. Thomas Johnson, shopkeeper sold him some cheese and gave him some onions which he put in a bag

Susan Speed lives near Rev Mortlock's residence which is across a field from hers. About 5pm she saw a stranger go by - described him just like the others He went as if intending to go to the house but Charles Fuller was working against the gate and so he turned into church yard. A bit later Charles Moss watched how this chap came out and went into Mortlock's gateway and out of his sight. Ann Lee, daughter of parish clerk, who usually cleans the church said the morning after the fire she found some onion peelings and crumbs of bread in the church porch



Now Edward Morley who lives in Gt Abington remembered the hounds being turned out just after midnight - obviously after something, or someone. Then he saw person coming from Abington Wood Park towards village - had a dark hat with broad brim; appeared to be a gentleman by his walk. Robert Freeman wheelwright also went to see; when he was near the church saw a young man coming his way - dark hat which fitted close to his head. Robert Ellis a labourer went to the fire about 2 am & as he crossed a close of lucern he saw a man standing against the fence wearing a dark loose coat or cloak. This same chap was seen by Henry Keath who was going out with his waggon an hour later.

John Reader, who lives Horseheath and two or three others saw a chap going towards Withersfield and Thurlow, where John Mortlock's mother lives. James Smith was working in her garden and saw him leave later - dressed the same way as all the others described. And he wore the same clothes a fortnight later when he came back - which is when Thomas Stearn the policeman apprehended him.

Well it seemed they'd got him bang to rights. In the court people testified they'd heard him threaten he'd murder his uncle and everybody knew he was a troublemaker. But then John Mortlock's lawyer started … on and on he droned for nearly two hours before the jury interrupted him. They said they'd heard enough – well the trial had started at 9 am and it was now midnight. They said there was insufficient evidence and dismissed the case! Mind you the Judge was no fool – told Mortlock he'd had a lucky escape and bound him over to keep the peace or be fined £500. But I'll lay you any odds we've not heard the end of this by any means!"

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Having some comprehensively spread the scandal of the Mortlock dynasty Isaac Moule now warmed further to the task, switching from a great banking dynasty to another greater family. If the Mortlocks had bequeathed Cambridge a bank, the Downings gave it a college - and a lot to talk about.

The story that emerged was remarkable and complex - how in 1700 a thirteen-year old girl, Mary Foster, had married her fifteen-year old cousin, George Downing, but how the family had made sure the marriage was never consummated – "after the marriage the pair were - as was custom - put to bed in the day time, and continued there a little while but in the presence of the company, who saw that they did not touch one another". Subsequently they kept it a closely-guarded secret, the two young people continuing as cousins, though now legally man and wife.

George went on the Grand Tour, visiting the cultural spots of Europe, leaving his virgin wife to remain a virgin until he returned. But Mary was not content to be cooped up in her father's house in the country and when the opportunity came for her to be presented at the Court of

Queen Anne she jumped at it - even though she had promised faithfully not to. On his return after three years George Downing found himself in the presence of his Queen and admired one of her beautiful young ladies-at-waiting. Who, he asked, was the vision. Mary Foster was the reply - his wife!

By now it was obvious the marriage was a sham, and equally obvious to Mary's family that she could win herself a much more influential husband if free to do so. Divorce seemed an answer but the only possible grounds could be Mary's adultery, but she was still a virgin. So they tried to get Parliament to annul the marriage. Sadly for Mary as the case proceeded George Downing's father died making him a Baronet and owner of extensive Cambridgeshire estates - and a very good catch indeed! Eventually the case came before the House of Lords in 1715 - a house packed with fifteen bishops, the Archbishop of York and even the Prince of Wales. The debate lasted three hours and the vote, when it came was close - 47 supported the petition, 49 opposed it - they were still legally married

Yet if they could not be legally separated they could each safeguard their worldly wealth from the other, thought this needed another petition to Parliament. Once more it dragged on, this time they were successful. From henceforward she was to live the existence of a married spinster, a wife without a husband, and George, while she lived, could father only bastards.

Mary was free to continue her career at court, becoming a favourite of the new Princess of Wales, and later Queen Caroline. Gossiping tongues wagged over Mary's romantic connections. A middle-aged gentleman often called upon her, liking to spend day in her company, though she was pleased to see him go. He was heard to declare that if he had been at liberty to choose she was the woman above all he would have asked to be his wife. The devoted swain was none other than Sir George Downing, her husband. Their attachment remained platonic till Mary's death in 1734.

Sir George was a most wealthy man with property around Cambridgeshire including manors at Ditton, Girton, Histon and Waterbeach amongst other places. He decided to make changes and demolished his family home was at East Hatley recycling the materials for a new and more splendid mansion at Gamlingay Park with extensive gardens adorned by statues of Roman gods, a maze to rival that at Hampton Court and an arched gateway, twenty-five feet high, known as Full Moon Gate. At 32 years old he had everything he could desire but was worried about who he could leave it all to. He drew up a complicate will trying to anticipate which cousins were most likely to outlive the other with the overriding importance that everything should remain in the Downing dynasty. But just in case some tragedy struck them all down he devised a back-up - it should all be sold and the money used to erect a college at Cambridge to be called "Downing's College"

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Sitting lonely in his new mansion at Gamlingay but still professing love for his wife, it seemed to Sir George Downing – according to Isaac Moule - that perhaps it was not too late for him to leave an heir of his own - though being still married it would only be a bastard. He was very rich and had a large house that needed a large number of attractive young servants to run it and so it came about that in 1722 his housekeeper Mary Townsend bore him a daughter who was christened Elizabeth. It was one high point in a life which seemed to be increasingly harder to bear, he lost interest in his estates which fell into disrepair.

George did however take an interest in something for he loved broad landscape views and decided to give himself the best in the county by building a tower at Tadlow from which he could look over his own estates towards Cambridge in one direction and Royston in the other. He was watching its construction in 1744 when a villainous fellow hit him on the head with a hammer and fired several shots at him. His assailant declared himself maddened that so much

money should be spent on a folly when all around were decaying houses and decrepit barns. Sir George never fully recovered from the assault and died in 1749

With her benefactor, Sir George Downing now dead, Mary his housekeeper, was in a predicament; she had his daughter to consider, she also had Sir George's will to look after, with strict instructions it was to be opened in the presence of two witnesses. Before the necessary arrangements could be made Mary went round the house, opening drawers and cupboards and gathering all the money she could find. £10,000 would be a suitable sum to be held in trust for her daughter and she got her brother to bury another £4,000 in the garden for a rainy day.

Mary saw their daughter Elizabeth married to a Cambridge man, John Bagnall and settled in one of the estate's houses, a property in London, 10 Downing Street. Their happiness was shortlived, Mary died and the new Baronet learned of the money which had been hidden in the garden and went to court to reclaim it from the daughter and he husband.

The beneficiary to the Downing fortune was Sir Jacob Downing who succeeded both to the estates and to Sir George's seat in parliament. He quickly married in the hope of producing an heir to safeguard his family's financial future. He spent money bringing the estates into better condition, repairing buildings and enclosing land but as the years passed and his wife failed to produce him an heir so he too became disillusioned. With her help he devised the idea of putting many of the barns and other new buildings on rollers so that they were not technically part of the estate and could be wheeled off and sold after his death.

Isaac Moule related how senior University academics had watched while Sir Jacob Downing passed away childless and other relations also conveniently died. Now there was just one person between Cambridge University and a new college. Thomas Barnardiston had been married twelve year, producing many volumes of legal reports, but no offspring. Once he was out of the way building of the new Downing college could begin.

But it was not that simple. All those named as trustees by Sir George had now died and the responsibility for carrying out his wishes passed down the line to half-a-dozen very elderly female relatives who really wished not to be bothered about it all.

And to complicate the matter further there was a very strong woman to contend with. Sir Jacob's widow, Margaret, was very reluctant to surrender any of the property. She quickly remarried, this time to a sailor, Captain George Bowyer with whom she quarrelled repeatedly A large buxom lady she was possessed of a strong personality and a strong punch, which she demonstrated on her husband on at least one occasion, making it up to him by the gift of £1,000, restoring his battered pride, if not his battered person – no wonder he spent most of his time at sea!

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"Margaret Downing was determined to frustrate the plans for a new Cambridge college. In her opinion the university was one where the science of horse-racing, hunting and extravagant entertainments were the chief studies, there were no great numbers clamouring for admission and anyway the existing colleges were half empty. She was determined that if she could not have the great mansion at Gamlingay Park, then neither should anybody else so she pulled it down and sold the materials by auction in October 1776 for far less than their true value. To add more spite she contrived to leave the rest of the estates in as complicated a fashion as possible, to ensure the University could not get at them easily.

It took more court cases, more complications, more disputes and even when they were finally concluded in the University's favour there was still the process of obtained a charter, buying the land and erecting the buildings

Cambridge Corporation, under the domination of the Mortlock dynasty, offered two sites; one at Pound Hill, the other at Parker's Piece. Neither came to anything. Then they settled on Doll's Close off Maids Causeway - but that as nowhere near big enough and the new college ended up selling it off for a pittance. In the end they settled for St Thomas' Lees off the newly growing Regent Street. The various landowners included different colleges but a lot of ordinary people had common rights, so there had to be a special Act of Parliament to ratify the deal.

The new college employed James Wyatt to draw up the plans - and when these caused controversy changed their minds and called for another set of ideas. In the end they settled for the designs of William Wilkins and building had started – which Pickwick had glimpsed when he came in from Trumpington. Even these were not what were planned because the price of everything had gone up so much since the designs were submitted. But they had to get them finished as soon as they could for with the end of the Napoleonic wars all the other colleges were bulging at the seams with undergraduates and more wanting to come.

Colleges were borrowing money and building like mad. I have heard tell that at Trinity they were worried about where they would find space – thinking about building across the river and cutting down the avenue of trees to raise new courts and towers and gates. Others were talking of putting an encampment on the common, lodging undergraduates in barges, hiring balloons so they could live in the sky or building castles in the air – I suspect some of these ideas came after they had indulged in one of their more extravagant feasts!

Be that as it may Trinity built a new court where the old college baking office used to be. They got it partly finished when it was burnt out, and they had to spend most of the building money on repairs – they finished it off shabbily, with stucco instead of stone, except on the river front

When Downing were ready enough to admit students they got several who switched from other colleges, anxious to escape from the rules, restrictions and the traditions of the historic colleges. People who wanted to live more like gentlemen in a country house than students in a medieval institution.

Well the outside of the old colleges are very grand and inside there's walls covered with ivy and old narrow, tortuous stairways with iron-bound doors, like some dungeon. I'm told that a mere hole in a wall can lead to half a house of rooms, some of them luxurious, some cosy with prodigiously thick walls - cold in winter and cold in summer, and others up in the garrets just large enough to hold a man in an arm-chair and a big dictionary – rooms that remind you how the colleges originally existed just for teaching priests. And that's one thing the new Downing men wanted to escape - compulsory attendance at chapel. And did you hear of the fuss this has caused at Trinity college"

[illus : New Ct ext & int SD18.15 & 18.16]

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How, wondered Pickwick, could attendance at chapel be such a hardship. Isaac Moule was quick to enlighten him. "I happen to have a friend at the porter's lodge at Trinity college, and what he tells me you'd hardly believe sometimes. The undergraduates are supposed to attend chapel three mornings and three evening a week, and mornings and evenings on Sundays.

Morning chapel begins at seven, so they have to have the gyp call them at 6.30 or a little earlier. You can imagine on a cold morning, after a hard night before that the students resent having to turn out so early. There's a rush at the last minute to get into chapel, often not properly dressed with their gowns flung on over their nightshirts and trousers. On Saturday evenings, Sundays and Saints days they have to wear surplices instead of their gowns – and very innocent they look!

If they get there within five minutes of the bells stopping their names are marked off on a long list by two college servants, but if anybody misses he has to report to the Dean. One undergraduate who had been very irregular in his attendance was asked: "What excuse have you for your absence from chapel, Sir?" "Please sir I felt no inclination to pray". "That's no excuse", roared the Dean, "I don't want your *** prayers, I want to see your *** face" – and he gave him a long section of text to copy out.

For those who have no intention of going into the church this can become irksome. Even one of the assistant tutors described chapel as "the constant repetition of a heartless, mechanical service – with an immense majority of the congregation it is not a religious service at all, and to the remaining few it is the least impressive and edifying that can well be conceived". That got him into deep trouble and he had to resign his post.

Then earlier this year one of the Master at Trinity decided that all undergraduates now had to attend chapel eight times at least, every week, and if they failed to do so they would be admonished or removed from the college. This caused great resentment and a number of them formed themselves into a society called "The society for the prevention of cruelty to undergraduates". They arranged that when they attended chapel they would keep a note of the attendance of the Master and Fellows. At the end of each week they published the result, and circulated them around Cambridge, as well as sending them to the London clubs. I've seen a copy for 10th March 1838. Out of a total of 14 services the Master & William Whewell managed to get to just 6, Sedgwick and Wordsworth only one and five others none at all. It's not as if they were unwell – for the students also kept check on who took diner in the Hall, and they were all regular attenders there. You can imagine the upset that caused – one rule for the students, another for the dons.

The cheeky blighters also issued some poems – most of them profane". Here Moule passed Pickwick a piece of paper, part of which I note below:

Oh! Master best! our nightly rest
Is spoilt, is broken through;
And we must hold, though wet and cold
To Chapel – and for you

'Tis all on account of your notice so long
And your many notanda so true,
That daily we're seen, hauled up by the Dean
With our gowns and our faces of blue"

"Mind you its when chapel's over the fun starts"

[illustrations Trinity great court, showing chapel
Chapel interior Rush to chapel – use this one for preference]

Sitting in a corner of the lounge of the Bull Hotel, Trumpington street, Isaac Moule suddenly stiffened, his eyes having spotted something, or someone, that interested him.

"Do you see that young gentleman, just come in, the one with his hat pulled down and collar turned up – odd on such a warm August day as this. Well he has got to be one of the bravest men in Cambridge, or one of the most foolhardy. You come along with me"

And with that Moule, resplendent in his Bellman's uniform, led Pickwick up to the newcomer, and tapped him sharply on the shoulder. "Mr Beverley, I believe!"

At that sudden shock the lad started, turned pale, went red – all in the same moment, and swung round horrified. His eyes took in first the outrageous costume, and then the twinkling eyes – "Isacc, you gave me the greatest fright. I thought it was one of the enemy".

"I've just been telling this gentleman here" – introducing Pickwick – "about the compulsory chapel at Trinity and the society the undergraduates set up to try and get things changed – you didn't rely on such tactics did you?

"Mr Beverley wrote a letter to his Royal Highness the Duke of Gloucester five years ago about the corrupt state of the University of Cambridge. It was not well received by the establishment, in fact they've been attacking him ever since – though I'm not sure quite what the Duke of Gloucester himself thought about it, not after what you said about him!"

"Why all I said was the truth – that his knowledge of the University was very superficial. Well he did indeed spend a term or two to receive a last touch of a princely education, but it was passed chiefly in the lodge of a courtly Prelate and mainly occupied in holding levees and receiving adoration from Masters and Fellows. His subsequent visits have added but slightly to his knowledge - royal amusements like public breakfasts, concerts, dinners and carousals - the labour of walking on scarlet cloth, hearing speeches in bad Latin from effete Vice Chancellors, sermons in bad English from superannuated Heads of Houses - unintelligible compliment of Latin ode and Greek epigrams and ludicrous ritual of Senate House. I thought he ought to know the truth of University life

"You – Pickwick – as a stranger you're struck with air of learning and religion,of venerable college courts, bells from a hundred towers, frequent summons to chapel and prayers (and still more frequent summons to Hall and eating). At chapel time you witness the novel appearance of 3-400 youths in white linen prostrate in well-simulated devotion, you admire the organ, wax candles, high altar covered with cloth of gold and all variations of hoods, copes, ruffs, scarves and caps worn by undergraduates. You see halls and library adorned with busts, statues – the very fountain head of wisdom and learning you believe. Not so

"The angelic looking undergraduate who goes to chapel at some ungodly early hour is swearing vehemently at the disagreeable penance of leaving his bed in a cold morning for such d--d nonsense. When devotions are finally over then its back to bed for 2-3 hours; before a late breakfast with friends. I'm not sure what you take for breakfast but for them it's devilled-kidneys, stewed beef-steaks, cocoa, chocolate washed down with ale, and cherry brandy. And that's just the start of their day

The new acquaintance, Beverley, paused for a sip of coffee before continuing to report his personal knowledge of undergraduate behaviour.

“When they finally finish breakfast then the whole day looms before them. Those with rooms overlooking the streets bring forth their tandem whips and sit at their windows cracking the whips at those passers by as it may be convenient or safe to flagellate. Dog, chimney-sweeps or perhaps a gyp are dextrously punished.

After an hour or so this begins to bore them so its off to the livery stables – there are several to choose from - and if there’s no hunt to join why they just mount their riding-horses, tandems or their curricles and drive about till Hall-time. Afterwards they ride or lounge about in shops and streets until at 6 or 7 in the evening they gather in their friend’s rooms to eat and drink with Scythian appetites. The noise and zeal of the revel increases, until glees and bumpers work them to frenzy of drunkenness. Then by 1 or 2 am its time for riot. Lamps & windows are broken, knockers wrenched off doors, shop-boards torn down and night-capped citizens peep from behind shutters in amazement.

There’ll be fights in streets when a stray snob or wandering beggar is terribly beaten and coal heavers attacked. Cries of "gown and town" echo through alleys, and a hundred auxiliaries rush from hundred supper-tables. Coal vessels pour forth dusty warriors, and mighty is the din, vehement the battle and furious the onslaught and much blood spilt until the victorious gownsmen – and in their eyes they are always victorious - retire to the brothels.

In my day it was no uncommon thing to make a party to go up to Castle-end immediately after Sunday-evening chapel. There’s another part of Cambridge called Barnwell which is a town set apart and dedicated to sin. Prostitutes swarm there”.

Pickwick, who had just a day or so earlier spent a most convivial afternoon amongst the good folk in the Wellington Inn in that district began to wonder himself just how much credence to place upon the testimony of this young gentleman. If students did indeed whip chimney-sweeps surely his young friend Tom would have mentioned it.

Suddenly more serious Beverley continued: “In my view the colleges are nests of licentiousness and all their laws of inhibitions are mere words. The means of escape are notorious, in spite of their ponderous gothic gates and bolts. In my view the best enforcers of morality are the lodging house keepers. Students are under more constraint in lodging than college. A lodging house keeper cannot keep undergraduate in his house but will certainly know when he leaves it & report accordingly. A regular profligate would greatly prefer college to a lodging in the town, unless the lodging keeper were one of those vile characters who will consent to anything for money

“It would also provide a better example than they get in college where several of the Fellows have mistresses. One demure Fellow used to visit his lady every Wednesday night - she barred her door against all other visitors at that time – but not on other nights, I can assure you. I’ve known an undergrad keep to bed in brothel 24 hours. Others become attached to prostitutes - even seek to marry them and in a couple of instances it has required all dexterity of his relations to separate one from the object of his attachment”.

“Ah”, interrupted Isaac, “but Cambridge folk are not always the victims”, and he began a most extraordinary tale that had filled the pages of the Cambridge newspapers in July 1836.

Pickwick replenished the coffee cups and he and Beverley settled down to listen to Isaac Moule's true tale.

"The case revolved around a somewhat notorious family, who - for proprieties sake I will call the Poles - though that is not their real name, and a rich undergraduate whom I will likewise retitle Brown.

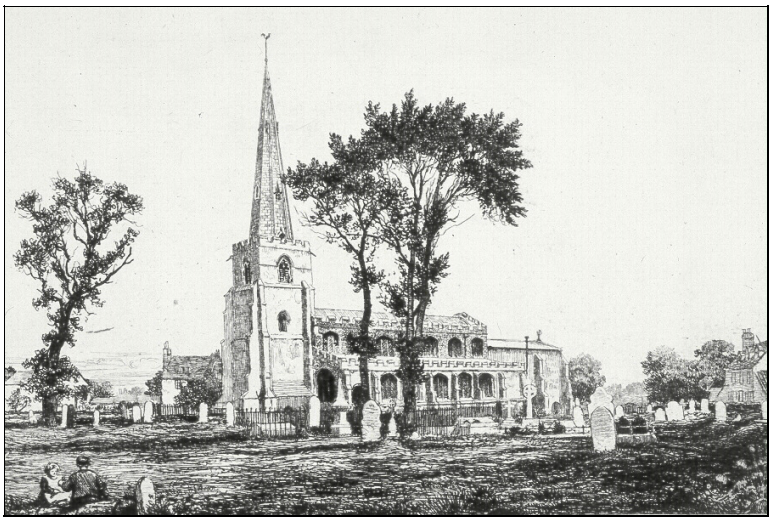
Now the Misses Pole were well-known to several undergraduate gentlemen, they received various visitors at their home and had certainly lost their reputations on more than one occasion

Mr Brown however became greatly enamoured of Miss Mary Anne Pole and together they eloped to Greta Green in May of 1826, later re-marrying at Yarmouth, and living as the husband and wife they undoubtedly were. After a year Mary gave birth to a daughter Harriet. Her husband believed that pretty as his wife was, she did not have the necessary education or standing to bring up the child, heir as it was to his family's fortune. He was anxious to have the child raised by his parents in Yorkshire

Meanwhile Mary's sister Elizabeth had earlier been rather too free with another undergraduate - a Mr Smith - and found herself pregnant. She was anxious to conceal the matter from the rest of the family so had the baby in secret at her aunt's house and arranged that it would be wet-nursed by Susan Jobson whose own (illegitimate) child had just died. Susan took the baby to Grantchester when it was two hours old and two days later carried it down to London on the outside of a stagecoach.

Eventually Mr Brown got to hear of his sister-n-law's "misfortune" and together they hatched a scheme which would benefit everybody. They would switch the two babies, Harriet would be sent up to Yorkshire, and his wife would never notice the difference. This seems altogether a strange arrangement but the exchange took place and Mary was persuaded that "her" child had suddenly aged seven months, grown appreciably larger and changed the colour of its hair. The Browns continued to live in Cambridge and had two more children, but they also began to squabble regularly and violently and their "daughter" went to live with her "aunt", Elizabeth.

Mr Brown meanwhile found himself in hard times and was imprisoned in the Fleet, London where, apparently dying, he confessed that he was not the father of the present Harriet. Later, after he'd sobered up from an excess of brandy he made a remarkable recovery.



Then in 1836 he appeared outside Elizabeth's house in Chesterton, together with two policeman. Elizabeth turned nasty, pulled two pistols on them and threatened to blow their heads off, but they broke down the doors, seized “Harriet" and took her to the Hoop Hotel - and it ended up in court.

Well you will understand just how this caught people's attention, the place was packed for whatever the outcome there was bound to be a scandal.

Elizabeth's brother - who said he was on good terms with her when she was inclined to be on good terms with him - said he knew nothing about any pregnancy, nor did the doctor who she claimed had attended the birth. But why would she go to court and lie, knowing that any fragment of a reputation she still had would be blown apart.

Mr Brown's family meanwhile had lashed out on no lesser person than the Attorney General to defend him. According to him Elizabeth had never had a child at all and the sisters had made up the entire tale in a plot to injure the reputation of one of the great families of the land. Was it best for the sweet and interesting little Harriet that she should be brought up in a respectable and virtuous manner or returned to such a haunt of vice and in a few years become devoted to prostitution.

Well he convinced the jury and they allowed Brown and his daughter to leave Cambridge - hopefully never to return. Meanwhile Elizabeth and Mary Ann Pole continue to fascinate gentlemen and the women even more so”

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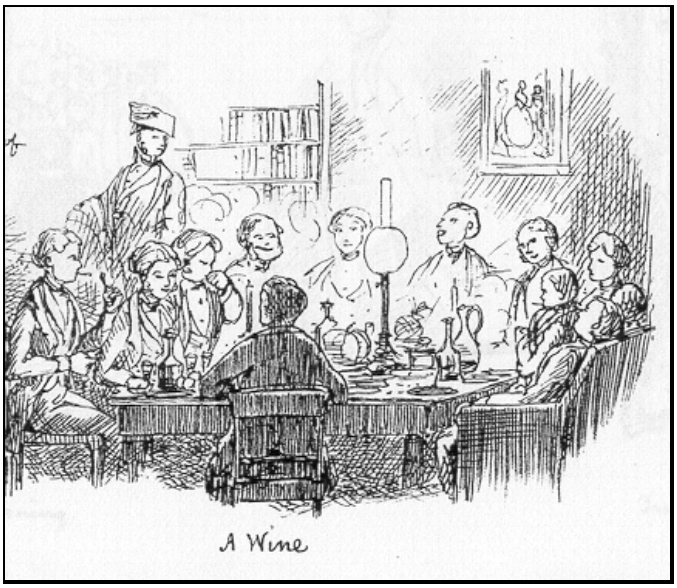
If Pickwick was agog at the deviousness of some of Cambridge’s womenfolk, his new acquaintance Beverley was confirmed in his belief that undergraduates were the subject of unscrupulous attacks by other sections of the town’s society.

“You hear people condemn the morals of students – but he come to Cambridge at age 18, precisely when there should be strongest curb on his passions and strict watch over his conduct. He comes ignorant of world and its vices. His purse is replenished for the occasion with ample riches - £300 a year is the average allowance, though some get only £200 – and this requires rigid economy to keep out of debt . But soon as he arrives temptation is placed in his path.

One of the first people he meets is his gyp – a male servant who drinks ale and occasionally pilfers from his employers, the very name means “vulture”. But to the freshman he’s a respected figure, one who knows just what a gentleman should do to be accepted in Cambridge – spend, spend, spend. Only too late do you realise he has an arrangement with particular shops who well reward him for the custom he puts their way”.

Pickwick recalled how earlier that very day he had been told of the hardships of trying to make a living as a shopkeeper in a Cambridge that was deserted for much of the year when there were no University students to sell to. But it seems there was another side to the coin – according to Beverley at least.



"Cambridge tradespeople send any items as matter of course of which freshman can hardly guess the object. The confectioner supplies liberally for the wine-parties, charges immediately and gives long credit: pineapples & preserved fruit and ices in varied columns are of daily occurrence. The frivolous youths soon take advantage of such temptations and vie with one another in multiplicity of wines they can offer their friends - champagne and claret considered almost indispensable - leading to great expense, gross debauchery and bills of enormous length. I've known an undergraduates drunk for a fortnight - brandy was the morning cry, bottled ale the substance of breakfast, 3 bottles of wine washed down dinner and drams sealed him up for the night.

"Another set of belly-masters gain an ample livelihood by preparing punch in its multiplied forms for the supper-party. Milk-punch, rum-punch, green-tea-punch, flip, bishop, toddy, burnt brandy, mulled-ale are in great request

"There are booksellers for the mind, tailor & haberdasher for the body, the private tutor for the intellect, bootmaker for legs, public tutor for nothing, harlot for something, livery stables for exercise, the upholsterer for sloth – they all fasten like leeches on coffers of undergraduate and leave him without a penny. Why I have known son of bishop order a pipe to value of £70 from Bacons, and long lines of popular novels in splendid bindings are ordered by the length to fill up a given space. You need only glance into W.H. Smith's shop in Rose Crescent or Deighton's in Trinity street. Even such modern novels as that Charles Dicken's recently serialised "Pickwick Papers" can now be obtained in fancy bindings at great expense – though who would want such an item in their bookcase completely eludes me …"

At this Pickwick reddened – to hear his work criticised by a college don in Stephenson's bookshop a few days earlier had been bad enough, must he now suffer it from this notorious former undergraduate too! But even Isaac Moule could contain himself no longer

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Breaking into Beverley's lament on how undergraduates were cheated by tradesmen, Isaac Moule presented the other side of the picture.

I know of just one such Cambridge tradesman as you describe – his name is Leopold Schwabacher, a dealer in imported wines and cigars, with premises in Bridge

street. Four years ago now he was visited by a young gentleman of Trinity college, the son of one of the Members of Parliament for South Hampshire, who kept the first of company in the university. During the two terms this gentleman was a student he ordered and consumed over £20 worth of wines – Champagne and hock, cigars, liqueurs and Eau de Cologne"

Beverley broke in: "The student's name – was it Fleming – why yes I knew him. Great good fun, splendid fellow and – I confess I may have enjoyed some of that very wine. I recollect he left Cambridge without a degree and joined the Greadier Guards, I wonder what has become of him"

"More to the point", interjected Isaac, "what became of the bill he left behind him. It has not been paid to this day. The lad's father refuses to accept it. And do you know why? He does not dispute the goods were ordered, that they were perfect and that they were consumed. What he argues is that the shopkeeper was wrong to have supplied them. He says that they were not necessities of life for an 18-year old youth at university – & Leopold was encouraging students to spend their days in langour and inactivity and their nights in idleness and luxurious indulgence. He contends that by refusing to pay the bill he is striking a blow for other parents blighted by such extravagance conducted by their sons whilst at University. And yet you have confirmed that such behaviour is commonplace!"

"Yes and it is encouraged by that great palm-warmer and ogre of young men- the college cook. I know one who receives a salary of £500 pa – making it the most valuable post in college next to Master's. In addition he has all profits from private dinners – and even college bakers charge 100% above market price of bread. You'll see a daily procession of cooks with white mitres on their heads and huge trays in their hands, carrying covered dishes to various apartments. But the undergraduate still has to pay his sizings and commons – the solids and liquors of college table - so the cook presents two accounts, a public college bill and a private festive bill. Thus you can see what with confectioner, breakfast-man, punch-man, wine-merchant, grocer & college cook - and by the end of year the student is in great debt mainly for his belly.

"My friend was doubtless a victim of the same situation. He would be terrified that his parents who calculated they could afford £200 each year for three years should find their worthless son has spent £500 in first year – doubtless that is why he left to join the army, so that he could pay off his creditors and family. Believe me many hearts are aching in various parts of England from pain, disgrace and terror of unliquidated debts - some clergymen I can name are still made to pay their debts after 20 years. And to add to the difficulties there are the unscrupulous money-lenders always on hand to advance a loan at extortionate interest.
But Isaac was not to be put off.

Isaac Moule continued to relate how the student had also run up large debts with James Peters, silversmith in St Mary's street. "Now you might argue that such things as gold rings or gold watch chains are not necessities of life but remember that this lad was the son of a father of very great wealth – a Member of Parliament with a house in Cavendish Square and a mansion at Stoneham Hall, near Southampton. He was a member of the Royal Yacht Club – and sent his son to college with a liveried servant who wore the crest of the family on his buttons and a very fine horse (- he probably even had enough cash to quarter it at Mayor Humfrey's stables – that's now the police station). Now if such a gentleman orders a new watchstrap, or a signet ring what is a jeweller to do. He cannot afford to deny him the goods, the family obviously has the money to pay for. And if the tradesman does refuse to give the gentleman credit why he would be attacked by the university who would probably take away his licence to trade – and then where would he be!"

Beverley was anxious to placate Moule. "Ah but many students do pay their bills – they give the money to their tutor, but the tutor retains the money for two or three years and profit from the interest. The dons know their power and abuse it to the last degree – there was a scandal about it in '35 with articles in the Morning Chronicle".

"And scurrilous lies they were", thundered Moule. "The students have two options – they can either pay the bills themselves as they incur them or arrange for an account to be sent to their tutor at the college. The tutor sends out his pupil's bills three times a year – at Christmas, Lady-day and Midsummer. The pupil has to discharge his Christmas bill by Midsummer, and the tutor pays the tradesman the following November. Even so the tutor will have often paid the bill before he receives any cash from the undergraduate concerned. Why just last year the Cambridge tradesmen issued a document in which they positively stated that they always received payment from the college tutors within thirteen months of submitting bills"

But surely, cut in Pickwick, even that was a very long time to wait for their money. No wonder the shopkeepers had to charge dear for their products if they know payment would be so long with-held.

“Ah but what about that instance when a tutor had to admit he had received a vast sum – was it not £20,000 - from his students and squandered the lot – that he had only enough to pay traders 5s in the pound”, asked Beverley

Yes, admitted Isaac, that was quite true – although the sums involved had been somewhat exaggerated, but it was an isolated instance, the only one in forty years and tutors were normally sober and unrighteous.

Now it was Beverely’s turn to explode: “Nonsense : their dinner & wine parties are frequent, the entertainment costly & superb. Some always dine in their private apartments which are decorated with representation of naked Graces - one has a collection of impure books in Latin, French and English which erotic store is in high requests among his friends. This same person has his concubine and natural children …”

Pickwick let it all wash over him. No wonder Mr Beverley was a most unwelcome person in Cambridge and needed his disguises!

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The heated conversations in the Bull Hotel, Trumpington street, were cut short as the door opened and a young lady walked in. Pickwick and his two companions each stared, for each knew her – though for different reasons.

To Pickwick she was his fellow traveller on Thomas Cross’s coach during his journey from London – was it only a few days earlier. The attractive young thing with the baby that was anything but – bawling out its lungs virtually the whole step of the way and emptying its bowels at similar intervals. Yet the last Pickwick had seen of the infant it was dying crushed and dead in the dust outside Gt St Mary’s church and it’s mother sobbing inconsolably nearby.

To his undergraduate companion, Beverley, she seemed to be more. For by the way he blustered and flustered, choked and stuttered it seemed all too apparent that he was the gentleman she had gone down to London to see – and to introduce to his baby son (of whose existence he had been previously blissfully unaware). And as for Isaac Moule – well quite how – or how often - he was acquainted with the lovely Fanny Hopkins was not something to be enquired into.

But if Fanny was surprised or embarrassed to see any of the gentlemen she did not show it. In a small town like Cambridge – and knowing as many gentlemen as she did – such encounters were obviously nothing new. Instead she accepted their invitation to join their table and partake of a cup of the Bull’s fine coffee – perhaps enlivened with a little drop of something stronger.

After a little inconsequential chatter, and aware of this grand opportunity of delving somewhat deeper into a topic likely to be of great interest to other members of his discussion group, Pickwick managed to steer the conversation around to the question of one Cambridge institution of which he had heard so much, but learned so little – the Spinning House.

This was the gaunt building on St Andrew’s street, almost opposite Parker’s Piece. It was the University’s private gaol into which those suspected of prostitution were unceremoniously hurled without trial. But it had not started in that way.

The original foundation had been established in July 1628 by Thomas Hobson, the carrier, as a means of relieving some of the poverty of the time and provide some honest calling where they could obtain work. Hobson bequeathed to a committee of University and townspeople

various premises on which they would erect a house for people prepared to work and another as a house of correction for unruly and stubborn rogues, beggars and others who refused to work. They were to bring in a supply of wool and flax which – it would indeed become a spinning house. But the good intentions had become subverted – and as Moule was quick to point out the future of the institution had been debated by the town council only a week or so earlier with plans now to pull down the present building and erect a small hospital in its place.

For the meantime however there was no doubt that it was one of the most wretched and miserable places in the country – a true abomination. Fanny knew it from first hand, and was happy to spill out the details.

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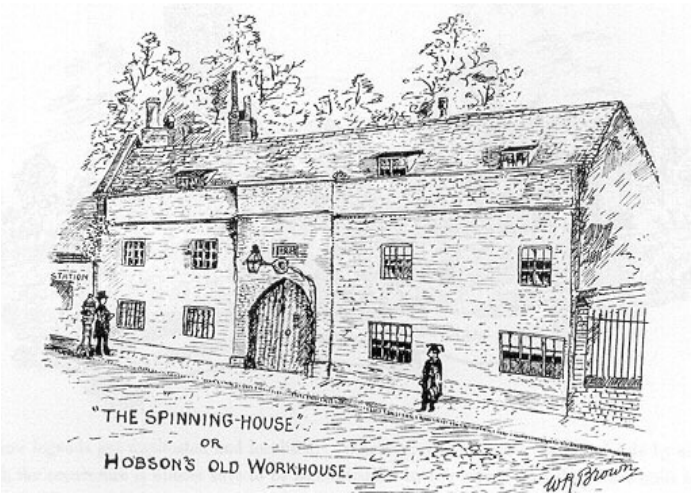
Fanny Hopkins was well acquainted with the gaunt building opposite the University Arms. While the latter offered luxury to those prepared to pay, the other offered far less comfortable accommodation – but it was part of the price that she and her fellow prostitutes were used to paying.

There was no doubt the university authorities had a tremendous problem in controlling the young ladies who flocked to the town and its large contingent of rich undergraduates. To counter the invasion the Proctor's patrol went out night and day armed with the power to arrest any female suspected of being an improper character.

Fanny had been an innocent girl when she'd become acquainted with the resplendent, gowned figure of the Proctor and his two men. Indeed on the first occasion she had been stopped when shopping and interrogated in the street with a perfunctory: "Who are you? What's your name?" Unaware of the existence of Proctors and their high prerogative, she had thought his conduct most insolent. Nevertheless she had politely answered the question only to find herself bundled back into the shop she had just left where she was interrogated for a quarter of an hour as crowds gathered to look and heckle the university officials. Unable to offer sufficient proof of her innocence she had been bundled off to the Spinning House and the horrors it contained.

On their arrival they had been greeted by the miserable functionary who doubled as porter, deputy governor, cook, attendant and chaplain who'd had to break off reading daily prayers to welcome another "canary" to his cage. Her clothes had been removed and replaced with a blue striped cotton dress before she was hauled off to a damp, airless cell about six feet by eight. Inside there was a straw mat, iron bedstead, flock bed and two blankets. There was no light save what struggled in through a small square gap in the iron shutters of the window, which being unglazed admitted damp and cold, wetting the bedding.



Fanny had spent the rest of the day in that dank cell, unsure of what was to happen to her and with no means of communicating with her family. Nobody came to bring her food and she

would have felt totally alone had it not been for the screams and curses of other women in other parts of that horrendous building. Finally just before nightfall the door was unlocked and the porter-cum-chaplain-cum-everything-else had entered the room carrying not supper but a warming pan – now almost cold – which he thrust under the blankets on the bed in a futile attempt to air them. The door had slammed, the lock had been turned and Fanny was alone again with her misery.

The night had seemed everlasting and not until nine o'clock next morning had the door opened to admit the Governor. Without further ado – or time to smarten herself up – she was led to another room to be confronted by another, even grander official – the Vice Chancellor of the University of Cambridge.

The proceedings had been brief. "Now let us hear what the proctor has got to say about this" said the Chancellor. "Well, sir, I was walking down the street and met this girl, and I think she is an improper character" replied the Proctor. "Did she come quiet". "No, sir, she protested and a crowd gathered". "I see, obviously guilty".

With that a piece of paper had been signed and passed to the governor. Fanny was taken back to her cell, the door slammed shut and she had broken into hysterical tears. How could this be happening to an innocent girl simply for shopping in Cambridge?

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Fanny Hopkins suppressed a sob as she thought back to her first morning in the University's Spinning House. Now however she was a regular, as she was happy to confide: "I've been in the Spinning House – Sinning House they ought to call it - altogether I don't know how many times. They won't take me now; they pass me in the streets as if they don't know me. They still won't give you any supper the first night they take you in, and it still a damp, dark, wretched and badly managed place.

"But that first time I was as modest a girl as it is possible to be - when I heard the language of the other women in the day room it made me blush rose red - but by the time I came out I was as bad as any of them. The girls say they get their education there - we call it 'going to college'. We all sit there huddled together, talking and using all manner of bad language, blackguard stuff and slang and doing the worst kind of things. No wonder the porter and the other's daren't come near us.

"Mind you there' s no place for us to wash except the pump in the kitchen, and when I was last there they wouldn't give us any soap till we kicked up a row about it, and said we'd go to chapel dirty if they didn't let us have some. One time they wouldn't let us have any breakfast, so we sat and shied coals at the windows and broke three hundred panes of glass. They gave me and the other girls three months in the House of Correction for that.

"Another time I kicked up a row and they placed me in a large cell in the top row, and kept me there for three days and three nights without any bed to lay on - nothing but the bare floor.

"When I first went we used to be allowed to have anything we liked to send out for, if we had money, or anything anybody liked to send us, except liquors. But we used to have gin and brandy sent in to us in bottles marked "bottled porter".

The last time I was in the gaoler brought me a bit of bread in the morning, and I threw it at him, and said I wouldn't eat such stuff as that. About twelve o'clock he brought me a little sugar and a spoonful or two of tea - what we're supposed to have is six ounces of bread for breakfast, two ounces of tea, half a pound of sugar and a pint and a half of milk - for the week. Four days in the week they give you five ounces of cooked meat and bread or potatoes

for dinner, the other days you get a pint and a half of soup and five ounces of bread. As for supper - six ounces of bread and one of cheese. One time the governor wouldn't give us any knives or forks, so we were obliged to take our victuals to our mouths with our fingers

"I have often seen girls dragged by the hair of their head from the sitting room into their cells, because they did not keep quiet. I have been served so myself many times. Once when they took me in the streets, they tore nearly everything off me: the proctor twisted my arm almost out of its socket, and I bit a piece out of his.

"When I was in my cell the gaoler came to take me to the Vice Chancellor, but I refused to go quietly. He then said, 'If you go quiet I will do all I can for you before the Vice Chancellor'. When he got me in, he said ' Now you wretch, you shall have all that I can ever make him give you.' I was so engaged that I seized the inkstand and threw it at him. I could not get my shoes off quick enough before the proctor's men and the gaoler got hold of me, or else I would have thrown them at him, so I smashed some of the windows in the Vice Chancellor's room with my fist, and cut it all terribly with the glass.

At last they got me away and put me in the dark hole, where I lay curled up in a pool of blood on the floor like a snake, with my new black mantle over my head. I slept so all that night. In the morning I was so cold and in such pain that I began to cry, and asked him to forgive me; and he said, 'No you wretch, you nearly killed me yesterday; I won't forgive you', He dragged me out of that cell and put me in another, and said, 'You wretch, stop there; that's a haunted cell; there was a man cut his throat there'. I begged and prayed of him to let me out and at last he said, 'I can't have the heart to keep you locked up any longer, although I was told to keep you locked up for twelve days and nights'. Then I was let out.

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Faced with the misery of the Spinning House, Fanny and the other prostitutes had decided to make an escape. "When we were all together we made up our minds that we would be out of that place. The first thing we did was to break the pan off the fire-shovel, and that left it like a chisel. We set to work and got one brick out of the wall, and then we got some water and poured in upon the mortar to soften it, and so we could remove another brick, and at last, by about two o'clock in the middle of the day, we had made a hole big enough for us to get through.

"The people who lived on the other side of the wall saw what we were about, and they hung up something over the hole to hide it, till we were ready to get out, and when we were all out we ran as fast as we could - the whole five of us, some with shawls and some without, but all covered with dust and mortar - up to Barnwell

"Once when the proctor came to see us, he went into one of the cells, and we locked him in, and while he was there we called him a 'wretched prostitute', and asked him if he was not ashamed of himself for following such a wicked course of life. One of us gave him a long lecture on the impropriety of his conduct, and when we let him out, we told him that if he was ever caught again he should be locked up for a longer time. The longest time I was ever in for at one time was three months - but one of the girls has been in, at different times, for not less than 103 weeks. It doesn't do the last bit of good. There's too much poverty in the town, and

too many wealthy university gentlemen - like Mr Beverley here - all too happy to exchange a few of their coins for a little bit of pleasure, despite the consequences"

Later that evening Pickwick took the opportunity to question his friendly policeman, about the problems of prostitution in Cambridge. It soon appeared that all was not quite as Fanny had made out.

"There's a lot of problems, especially during term time – the rest of the year the streets are usually much quieter. But it's not just the women who feel unsafe to walk the streets. A couple of years ago a chap from Babraham, William Radcliffe was drinking at the Anchor with Fanny Hopkins when another girl, Emma, came up and told him it was no use waiting for Hopkins as she was a married woman. Well Radcliffe told her he wanted no woman. She replied, "Yes you do you are a stranger and you shall go home with me". She took him over the Market Hill, down St Mary's Passage across Senate House hill and into Gerard Hostel Lane. About four hundred yards up the lane there was a gate; she stopped there and asked him for one shilling and six pence. He said he would not give her any such sum and turned away. That's when the fun started

Emma suddenly shouted "Here comes my husband - he will set you to rights" and this brute of a chap came along in a right passion with several of his friends. He knocked Ratcliffe down and rifled his pockets, his mate put his hand over his moth so he couldn't call out & Emma hit him on the head with a stick. All the time the girl was shouting 'You b---, I'll make you remember bringing me down this way. Kill the b---'. The poor chap tried to put his hands over his head to keep the blows from it and received a whack on his finger which broke his nail. There's no telling what would have happened had not a gentleman of Trinity College put up his window and they all ran away. The poor chap was taken to the hospital and was there for five weeks. He now always wears a wig to cover the scars. I think you can say he's learned his lesson – and so have the assailants, they're now on the other side of the world.

Pickwick shared his discoveries of the seedier side of Cambridge life with other diners at the Castle Inn, that evening, and such is the way of things, one of his companions was able to present another aspect to the situation.

It appeared that if women were the problem, and women were the victims, women were also seeking a solution. A Ladies Committee had recently been established to establish a Female Refuge, whose objects, according to the handbill found amongst Pickwick's papers, was "to afford to females who have been leading a sinful course of life, and expressed a desire of returning to the path of virtue, a temporary refuge, where they may be sheltered from temptation, be provided with proper employment and receive religious and useful instruction, until an opportunity occurs for restoring them to their friends, transferring them to a penitentiary, or placing them in some situation where they may procure for themselves an honest livelihood"

They had sought out a moderately sized house, Dover Cottage, on East Road, which they were even at that moment in the process of fitting up. If things went to plan they would be seeking a matron who would not only be able to minister to the girls physical needs but also their spiritual, liasing with parochial clerics over such matters as religious reading.

But, aware that idle hands could lead to the sluttish behaviour of the Spinning House, this new institution would supplement reading and instruction with needle-work, allowing the girls some income from the proceeds

It was long overdue, as Mr Fish, curate at Barnwell, pointed out. Several females – to the number of ten or twelve – had come to him confessing that his ministrations had convinced them of their sin and danger; that they were truly unhappy, and were most anxious to forsake their course of life, and to pass into the way of obtaining an honest maintenance. He had made most strenuous efforts to accomplish their desire, but nobody would take them in as servants, and they had no other avocation, save prostitution.

The experiences of one girl would stand for them all, we will call her Daisy. She had been living in respectable service for two years, during which time she had been seduced and held secret illicit intercourse. This of course was nothing new, servant girls in grand houses were often propositioned by the Master or his male friends. A little dalliance, a little fun, a little experience of the "upstairs" life, rather than "downstairs" squalor, was greatly tempting. And should a baby come along why many a Master would take care of it to avoid any semblance of scandal.

Then one evening she was tempted when sent on an errand to Stourbridge fair (that source of ruin to so many an unhappy girl); here she fell into still deeper sin. Not returning all night, her disgrace was discovered. With difficulty her parents, (who were respectable shopkeepers) sought her out and brought her home; but so deluded was this poor creature, that to obtain her liberty she jumped out of the window and again went to the haunts of sin. Again the poor father sought her out, and brought her home; and to prevent her escaping a second time sat up all night in her chamber.

If such a girl could be found a secure home where she could repent of her sin, be educated in the way of the Lord and finally found a situation with a pious family, then there was chance for her salvation. The Female Refuge would offer such hope. Many had already subscribed – including Joseph Romilly, whom Pickwick had met on Parker's Piece. Messrs Mortlock's bank would welcome additional donations, and what better place could there be for the cheque that Henry Gunning had pressed upon him when he too was in distress?

[ILLUSTRATION : servant : THE FEMALE REFUGE PROMISED TO OPEN THE DOOR TO A NEW START FOR FALLEN WOMEN
tea : CAMBRIDGE LADIES OFFER MORE THAN JUST SYMPATHY TO SERVANT GIRLS]

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Amongst the various oddments of printed material bundled alongside Pickwick's notebook- is a copy of one of the local newspapers - the Cambridge Chronicle and Journal and Huntingdonshire Gazette for Saturday, August 11, 1838. Various stories have been circled,which obviously attracted his attention - and prompts the thought, why travel to discover curiosities when curiosities from around the country can be found in the pages of a weekly newspaper.

Being in an agricultural district, with farmers amongst the customers of the Castle Inn, several harvest stories seem to have caught his eve. It appears that much of the country was in the grip of unseasonable weather: "In many places the rain has poured down in torrents and fields of growing turnips and potatoes have been partially laid under water considerable periods" was the report from Whitehaven. which Hull and Newcastle echoed. Better news from Exeter where "an ear of oats was plucked by Mr Palmer of Whitelyhouse near Lifton from a field on his farm which. when counted, ,was found to contain 305 perfect oats, besides others which had not come to maturity".

In Wiltshire there was a less welcome discovery: “Wheat is much injured by the small yellow maggot in the car., the fowardest wheat is most affected. The harvest will be later than it has been any year since 1824, when reaping commenced on the 16th of August", though from Chelmsford came the news that "Harvest has commenced in this neighbourhood. A field of oats upon the Warren Farm, Writtle and one on Patching Hall Farm, Broomfield, have within the last few days yielded to the sickle".

Other crops were being hit in other ways. "The apple crop in our neighbourhood will be a complete failure. Most of the orchards in the parish of Barcombe, a locality celebrated for the growth of apples, where the owners have been in the habit of gathering from 200 to 300 will not this season yield freely 20 bushels. The foliage is swarming with myriads of caterpillars' reported the Sussex Advertiser. “On some of the hop grounds at Orchard Portman, near Taunton, the insects have committed such devastation as to frustrate all chance of the. slightest crop" was the story from Somerset. From Dumfries came news that: "Between the Nith and Dee there is a constant alternation of healthy and diseased potatoes. But bad as the potatoes confessedly are, the farmers complain more of the turnips".

Thus acquainted with the situation around the country Pick-wick turned to the. prospects nearer to home. In Norfolk the hay harvest had concluded: "and we shall find abundant reason to be thankful that Providence has thus far crowned our labours with success. The general aspect of the Turnip crop is equally, promising, although at one period the formidable appearance of the tribe of black cankers seemed to threaten a most unfavourable result. Happily however the late cold weather has checked their ravages and, as everywhere, we see the plants arising to the hoe faster than the men can properly perform their work, we are led to anticipate the security and perfectibility of the crop". The Norfolk Chronicle was anticipating the corn harvest would commence on about the 29th August., barley and oats, beans and peas were looking well, grass was plentiful "and the country altogether wears a favourable appearance., and whether we regard the well-being of the tenantry, or the condition of the labourer we are led to infer a real and substantial improvement has taken place which insures tranquillity and superinduces the hope and belief that it will be permanent"

But this, Pickwick mused, did not square with some of the stones of hardship he had heard in the Barnwell tavern from people who had fled the poverty of the Cambridgeshire- countryside for the prospect of work- in the town, partly caused by inclosure such as that currently taking place at Linton, Swavesey Sutton & Chesterton - wherever that was

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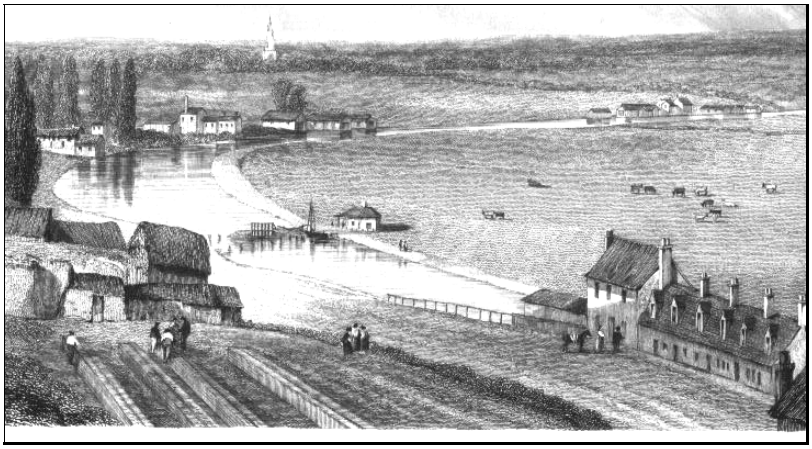
"Chesterton? Wraggs, riots and Italian rectors!"

Such was the reaction of barber David Adams when Pickwick mentioned the village during his next morning's shave. It was an area under profound change, now that the Enclosure Act had gone through, despite local opposition

"William Wragg and his family have bought up land over the last fifty years or so, but were always against it. They fought the proposals back in 1814 – and in 1773 before that, and while the three old Benson ladies – Mary, Rebecca and Elizabeth were alive who owned the Chesterton Hall estates - they could block the application. But now there's just Mary and she was just too tired to be much bothered when they tried again in 1835.

"Everybody else could see that it would have to come. Most of the other Cambridge open fields were enclosed years back and people made their fortunes selling land for building and throwing up houses, like they have done in Barnwell."

Chesterton was still divided up into three fields, cropped wheat one year, barley or beans or peas the next and then one year fallow. The East Field was generally good land, though some bits were foul and full of charlock, the Middle Field was somewhat heavier soil, and the West a strong clinging clay, difficult to manage either wet or dry. However much the farmers would gain from having their old strips brought together in larger plots they would have to spend a considerable amount on drainage and improvement works before they could gain any substantial increase in revenue – certainly not enough to offset the expense of the Enclosure process. They'd probably have to sell off some of the land to cover the costs involved



"Mind you while the farmers will suffer those people who get given plots to the south of the parish, around Castle Hill, can be sure to sell it off for building at a good profit."

Pickwick could understand too well the conflicting interests which must have raged around the little village, some hoping and some fearing that the whole of the area north of the river might disappear under a mass of housing. But some Academics had learned some of the lessons of Barnwell and New Town and were determined to prevent it happening in Chesterton.

"George Peacock of Trinity College – an astronomer – and others seem determined to block mass building, wanting to keep areas open for recreation. They've insisted on a wide road being made along the riverside, even want some of Thomas Fisher's brick kilns and buildings taken down to widen the turnpike. Fisher moans about it but they've offered him

compensation for all the relocation work, and they've given him a year or two's grace, so he's on to a good thing. And now if we're going to have a building boom – and that would make a good deal of work for everybody - why then you're going to need all the bricks you can get."

The enclosure process had been grinding on for three years, but now seemed gathering pace. Pickwick's newspaper reports that the Commissioners had been staking out the new Chesterton Road alongside the river to Chesterton Great Lane, together with a north-westerly road through Alboro' Meadows to the Histon Road and a Green End Road to join the Ely turnpike road. These, together with two more from the Jolly Waterman public house - a River Road running down to the river and a Backside Road to the Histon road near the north-west corner of Snail's furlong, would soon be constructed. Always providing a public meeting to be held at the Bull Inn within the month, did not throw up objections. Only time would tell if the green riverside fields become submerged under raw-brick terraces.

[ILLUSTRATIONS PANORaMA : view from castle Hill over open fields towards Chesterton A1838 3210
CHEST : Chesterton road, newly set out alongside the river]

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Wraggs, riots and Italian rectors had been David Adam's comments on Chesterton. Presumably, suggested Pickwick, the riots must also have something to do with the opposition to enclosure – like that at Lt Thetford, when villagers had fought a pitched battle against the police

"Oh, no, sir – it's got nothing to do with the loss of your land or your livelihood. It's much more that just that. No this was a proper riot about something important – football!"

Football? Pickwick knew it had been brought to this country by the Roman legions and had been played in Cheapside, Covent Garden and Lincoln's Inn fields in London, way back in the 1100's. The game was nothing more than a legalised riot, surely never permitted in Cambridge.

But Chesterton's connection with football went back to 1579, when the village lads challenged a number of university students to a friendly match near the church. Just to reassure their opponents that things would stay friendly they arranged for the chief-constable of Chesterton, Thomas Parish, to be there. And just in case they didn't stay friendly the Chesterton lads armed themselves with wooden staves which they hid in the church porch.

The game started well enough but then – and some said deliberately – somebody started a quarrel. "This was what the local lads were waiting for – out came the staves and they walloped into the students, breaking their heads and sending them running through the river in an attempt to get away. And when the grads turned to the constable and urged him to do his duty and keep the peace what did he do – he turned to the townsmen and told then to keep up the good work! Of course he wasn't allowed to get away with it – the University had him locked up in Cambridge castle."

After that students were usually allowed only to play within the college courts or gardens, as at Gonville and Caius, while at Trinity they played between the college and the river before Wren erected his library and quite spoiled the playing area. Once when that college had challenged by their neighbours, St John's in 1618, on the neutral ground of Sheep's Green, the Triniticians had chickened out, and not turned up. Perhaps it had something to do with St John's style of play –which was why John Barwick had given up the game after breaking the collar-bone of another player around 1632

In those days, however it had been Magdalene that had the reputation for prowess, though whether its fame was due to its proficiency in the game or to the supply of college ale to slake the thirst of the players was something else. Whatever it was they'd managed to attract Richard Culmer from King's School, Canterbury, a man famous in his day for 'football playing and swearing'.

Pickwick had never heard of him, but did know of another famous exponent of the game, as David Adams related. "Some say that Oliver Cromwell himself used to play football when he was a student at Sidney Sussex, indeed I've heard him described as one of the 'chief matchmakers and players of football, cudgels or any other boisterous sport or game'. But he complained he was 'infallibly sure of being tripped up by the other players', who were almost invariably destined for a profession in the church".

So was it Cromwell who arranged for the Italian rectors at Chesterton?

[LLUS : CHESTERTON CHURCH, no.1 is 1814, no.2 is 1880]

RESTART
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The barber began to relate a tale of Italian involvement with King John way back in the 1200's, when that monarch was embroiled in various controversies, what with his wars with the barons, Magna Carta, the loss of his jewels in the Wash and all that. Some of this Pickwick knew, other bits he half-remembered, but what had it to do with Chesterton.

It appeared the Pope had sent one of his cardinals to try and prevent a French invasion of England in 1216 and when the wicked King John had died had stayed on to assist the new seven-year old King, Henry III. So grateful was the lad for all the help given by Cardinal Guala that he made him a present of the Manor of Chesterton, together with the church of St Andrew which had been built by the villagers. Now Guala wasn't go to look after it himself, so he appointed a clerk to collect the manorial rents and send them back to him in Italy. Once home he founded an abbey of his own, at Vercelli, which he dedicated to St Andrew, endowing it with all his great wealth - including his Chesterton manor.

Though Chesterton acquired its own vicar, the Italians appointed a Rector or Proctor who took precedence over him - and to demonstrate his importance they needed a big house. So they built themselves a grand dwelling. But what with the expense of maintaining the building and collecting the taxes, and sending the money back to Italy, it all became somewhat of a burden. They tried to pass it to the Abbess at Denny, but that fell through, then to Winchester college Oxford and that didn't come about either. In the end it went to King's Hall, now Trinity college, though the Italians later tried to claim it back. It's still there, a grand stone house tucked away in the sleepy village of Chesterton, the second oldest house in the area.

Pickwick's scrapbook contains an engraving of the Chesterton priory, though it does not appear that he ever visited it himself. He did however resolve to discover the site of the oldest house in Cambridge, nestling under the walls of another Chesterton building, one far removed from the village. ..

Thus once removed from the barber's ministrations, equipped with a stout walking stick to take pressure off his still-tender ankle, Pickwick set off to explore something of the ancient town of Cambridge, he had not previously seen.

Thus it was that he found himself strolling towards the open spaces of Midsummer common. On his right the road stretched towards Newmarket, obviously once a muddy passage for a stretch of footway stood high and dry above the road, bearing the name of Maid's Causeway. Notes in his journal reveal that this causeway had been made under the will of a great local benefactor, Dr Perse, and there on the left, in Jesus Lane, stood the row of quaint, neat almshouses founded 200 years earlier to accommodate two poor widows and four poor, godly, ancient maidens. Although the foundation might have been old, the cottages themselves were newly restored - apparently by none other than another benefactor - William Mortlock.

But in this most melancholy situation he glimpsed what was surely an even older building, its massive white square tower dominating the area. But what was it, could a stranger merely walk in, or would there be a guide- to show him around. He decided to explore.

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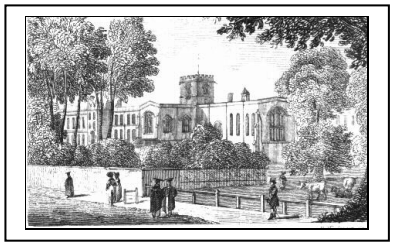
Picking up his courage Pickwick crossed Jesus Lane and strolled down the chimney – though at the time he did not realise that the broad gravel walk which led down to the imposing gatehouse rejoiced in this facetious name within Jesus college. But then, until he enquired of a college porter he did not know it was Jesus college. The porter, a comely little man, was delighted to have company to while away a boring August morning, with very little going on, and offered to escort Pickwick to some of the sights not normally open to visitors.

Once through the college portal they entered great court, venerable under thick masses of ivy and open to the meadows on one side, giving a glimpse of some of the town churches and the stark new architecture of St John's college. They proceeded through an archway into the cloister court. This, he knew, had been the site of the grand installation dinner for the Marquis Camden in 1835 when a large pavilion had been erected over it and guaranteed waterproof, until it rained in torrents drenching draperies and flags.



He had not however heard of the great balloon ascent of 1789. "That was Mr Edward Clarke's doings – young lad, admitted to college when he was 16 years old, and he decided to make himself a balloon, all by himself. There was nothing new about balloons – they'd been a couple sent up from Emmanuel, and another from Trinity Hall – but for Jesus to ascend to the heavens – that would be, if not a first, at least something to remember. So he set about it, took him weeks to get it right, and then he suspended it for some days in the college hall – took up virtually the whole height. Well you can appreciate it was the talk of Cambridge and on the great day a vast number gathered all around the area. The balloon was brought out onto the grass patch in Cloister court and up it soared, right over the college battlements and the towers of the great gate. Various people chased after it on horseback to bring it back, if it ever came down – and to try and rescue the passenger. Oh, no, not Mr Clarke – he sent up the college kitten!

"Mind you its not cats this college is famous for – it's cows. That passage where the chapel door is – that's "Cow Lane". It commemorates an inquisitive animal who wandered up the passageway until it became stuck completely fast, paying for its curiosity with its life, but ensuring its immortality. But there's something else you ought to see"

Here Pickwick was led along the cloisters to a mysterious door. His guide turned a key and they ascended a broad staircase, solemn and sombre, up one flight, up two – and by now Pickwick was puffing. He looked for a chair, but found instead a quite different piece of furniture, glistening white and horrible, – a grinning skeleton, seemingly quite at home in its corner. Alongside stood an old globe, from which time and damp had stripped seas and countries. A little further on and, far above him, Pickwick spied a row of books, enveloped in dust and cobwebs. So old, so thick, so tall, so massive, having so much the appearance of being made for another generation that he could believe they put so far out of reach than none could have right or claim upon them. They stood defying hand and stool, steps or even ladder.

Another door, another turn of the key, and the Library opened before him; a long low room, distant and ancient. Bookcases jutted out from the sides, and between them were placed antique stools and rickety tables. His eyes scanned old scientific treatises, tracts relating to dead and forgotten controversies, ponderous masses of civil and canon law. It was a room badly lighted and badly aired, the sun beating down on the leaded roof already rendering the heat intolerable. It was not a place to linger – certainly not when the porter was proposing they move to an all more attractive area of the college – the kitchen

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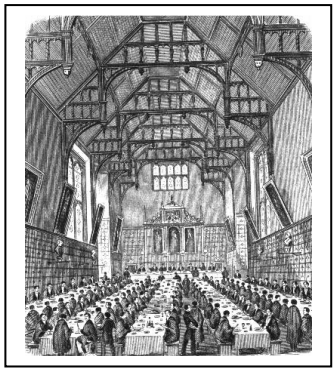
The porter led Pickwick from the labours and dust of centuries and once more into the open air of Jesus College cloister. It was a few steps from the college library to the college kitchen. But what a contrast. The doors of the one always open, the doors of the other always closed. In the first almost perpetual silence, in the second almost perpetual bustle – busy voices, flitting forms of white-aproned figures, clatterings on dressers, the music of the spits revolving before a fiery furnace, with the great work of preparing and sending forth stores for the support of the body, ever going forward. But though now all was peace as the college continued its summer slumbers.

And it was there in the kitchen that Pickwick met John Wisken, scullion not of Jesus college but Christ's., taking a welcome break away from the hothouse of that college. For whilst his porter friend seemed content with his lot the scullion was not – and he was happy to recount something of his troubles.

In college, he learned, the preparation of meals and general cleanliness of the whole of the kitchen premises was the responsibility of the cook – a well-paid job as Pickwick had heard. But the scullion was responsible for the dining hall, the buttery, the pantry, the cleaning of the kitchens, and, through his wife, the preparation of vegetables. It was a job done year by year by year in Cambridge college kitchens but one the outside world knew very little about

"Every morning in winter and summer I'm in the kitchen at six. I have to see the two kitchen stoves lit and then make sure the fires in Hall are burning brightly for when the students arrive for their studies at nine o'clock. Then it's back home to prepare myself for the rest of the day



"The main college meal is served at four in the afternoon – but the students will still be in the hall till half-past three. Just half an hour to set out 53 water plates, glasses, settings of knives, forks and spoons and salt jugs"

What were the water plates? "Obvious plates you put hot water in to keep the dinner plates hot- and taking of keeping hot I've then got to stir the fire, light the candles and all before the clock strikes four.

“I have to make sure the waiters are ready to serve the joints and then it’s my job to ring the dinner bell. Servants – you can’t keep them in order, while some scholar’s reading grace they’re larking about behind the screen. Then its all go, the waiters are running around, the students are yelling and everybody’s complaining and calling for me – the meat’s tough, somebody’s dropped his knife in the gravy – you should hear them

“Wisken potatoes I do want. Wisken do bring the greens this way. Wisken ask if there’s any soup. Wisken do hear me what I say. Wisken bring me currant jelly. Wisken some onion sauce, don’t dwell. Wisken make haste my good old brick - or damn you I’ll kick you to hell. Wisken bring me a glass of ale. Wisken pray bring that joint to me. Wisken bring me some bread and cheese. Wisken the sizings let me see. Wisken bring me a glass of beer. Wisken bring me some apple pie. Wisken bring me celery and cheese. Bring water, or I die.

“All their tongues are going at once. You have to have patience or you’d go mad. What a noise and clatter and then within half an hour its all over. Some scholar reads the grace again and the hall empties in a jiffy. And it’s then that my job really starts”.

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John Wisken rested against a table in Jesus college kitchen and rejoiced in having a stranger to impress with his account of the hardship of a college scullion’s life.

As he told Pickwick once the students had left Christ’s college dining room it was his job to ensure that any “extras” were booked down. This involved quizzing the servants. “Well one chap would have ordered extra bread, another a beer and I have to make a point of asking the servants as soon as I can, elsewise they’ll forget, especially once they’ve been clearing the glasses for a bit. You’ll see them carry a half-empty glass of beer or wine out of the dining hall and by the time they get to the kitchen that glass’ll be empty. Not that I’m not partial to a drop when opportunity suits – a good glass of ale and old port is my tipple

“I haste away to the buttery and put all the extras down, making sure every man is charged for what he’s had but they’ll always quibble the bill. Then I have to go round and clear the water plates, see every thing’s all washed up and only then can I get home for a bit. Not that my day’s done, far from it. I have to be back at college to serve supper at nine o’clock, then clean up again. It’ll be late before I get to bed, snatch a few hours sleep and all too soon its back to Hall for another day’s work. Such filthy, horrid, dirty work for myself, wife and servants to do, any one that could live at all need not wish such work to go through”

Pickwick racked his brain for something to say to stop Wisken’s moaning – glasses, plates – college plate. His mind clicked – surely even dirty plate was magnificent plate

“Indeed it is; why at Christ’s college we have the Foundress’ cups, given by Lady Margaret herself – she left half to us and half to St John’s – but they sent most of theirs to the King during the Civil War. There’s a silver gilt one quart cup standing over a foot high, a pint cup and six spoons which were presented to her by her god-mother. The big cup has the arms of the Duke of Gloucester and Eleanor Cobham who was sentenced to life imprisonment in 1441 for witchcraft and treason. It seems she made a wax image of the King – Henry VI - and laid it out in the sun, so it melted. The idea was that as it melted so would the king’s health and as her husband was heir to the throne on the Lancastrian line she

thought that way she'd get to be Queen. Quite how the Lady Margaret got it we're not sure, some say it was a christening present from the Duke. And the college has other treasures presented by other worthies, and we commemorate our benefactors – not like the town council

"Why about two years ago the new "reformed" council sold off their valuable corporation plate, table-linen, knives and forks that belonged to the old council –some of them even wanted to sell off the corporation mace as well. There was a rose water dish given back in 1676, various cups and stoops, a coffee pot that Tomas Halstead gave them in 1765, a tankard, 30 decanters and various spoons, some only given as recently as 1823 – and the donors still living!

"I went along to the auction sale at the Guildhall. Well I know the old council used to indulge themselves in great dinners but there was no fuming turtle, smoking sirloin or dainty venison that day. The cloths were laid in heaps, the empty decanters stood in rows, and all those silver cups. Alderman Benjamin Bridges started off the sale with two large jugs – they sold for two shillings! The crockery fetched the grand sum of just seven bob, as did five pairs of salts and he got less than two pounds ten for 15 decanters. Well the silver tablespoons sold at 6s.3d an ounce. There were people there snapping up the bargains – and bargains there were to be had. The whole lot sold for about £130. I have no doubt in a few years time they'll change their minds and start to try and buy it all back again"

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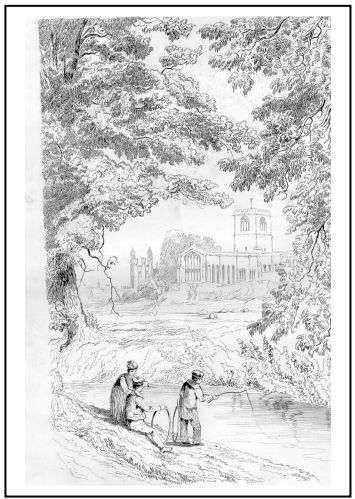
Just opposite to the kitchen door of Jesus college was the 'buttery-hatch', a half door with shelf upon it, forbidding the nearer approach of bed-makers and others not entitled to entrée. But with the sanction of the college porter – having made doubly sure nobody else was around - Pickwick and the scullion, Wisken, passed through and into a vaulted room, small but exceedingly snug and comfortable. This was the seat of government of that most important potentate, the butler, in whose breast was deposited the great secret of the Jesus college cup, to be transmitted to his successor alone. Beyond lay vast caverns of cellars, where in lazy tubs and innocent bottles slept a mighty power, used to gladden and enliven the spirits of those privileged enough to partake of it. And today this included Pickwick.

Quietly ensconced in a comfortable corner, their thirst increasingly slaked by some particularly fine college claret – opened bottles that had been spirited away from some college feast when the diners had imbibed too freely already to notice their disappearance – Pickwick was regaled to a tale of crime well worthy of recounting to his friends at the Pickwick Club.

As Wisken related it Richard Kidman was one of the most artful and successful plunderers that ever infected Cambridge society some forty-or-so years earlier. He was born at Waterbeach to labouring parents who bound him apprentice to a gardener in Cambridge. Soon Richard began to make his name in the barbarous sport of cock-fighting and to finance his losses he turned to crime, robbing his master's gardens and being committed to the Bridewell. But as this was his first offence his master forgave him, and took him back into his employ. So Kidman robbed him again, along with several of his neighbours, particularly of garden fowls.



This time he was publicly whipped on Cambridge market and imprisoned in Cambridge castle. As soon as he was let out he bound himself to a shoemaker and worked at this trade for a number of years. But he tired of that and turned his hand instead to the profession of plumber and glazier, meeting up with a master more celebrated for ingenuity in his business

than integrity in his conduct. From him Richard learnt many skills and was bequeathed a variety of tools and other mechanical instruments and contrivances.

With this stock in trade Richard Kidman set up for himself. He started to make and clean wooden clocks for country people and built up a good reputation. He also began spending many quiet nights in the fields behind the colleges with various mechanical devices which he claimed were lures and traps to entice birds. He continued his plumbing and glazing business, which gave him unrivalled knowledge of the interior of college rooms, butteries and private apartments.

It was while he was cleaning windows at King's college that he made the acquaintance of a chimney sweep, William Grimshaw. Now this William was – on the surface - a religious, God-fearing man, but he had a weakness for wine and women, which involved him in expenses far above what his honest trade could finance. The two men hit it off well, went for long walks together. Sometimes they would be talking clocks, sometimes birds, sometimes chimney sweeping but more often colleges – and how easy it would be to rob them in the summer, at times like this, when the gentlemen had gone down.

For four years they conducted a series of robberies which defied the vigilance of the police, infused distrust into families, destroyed the confidence in servants of unshaken and unsuspected fidelity, and kept the whole of Cambridge in a continued state of amazement and alarm.

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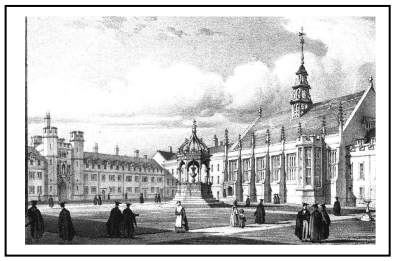
The first robbery that Kidman and Grimshaw committed took place in August 1796 at the treasury of King's college. It was usual for the Provost to send the college plate there for security when he left for the summer. The two confederates got into the room in the dead of the night and managed to take an impression of the wards of the lock. This served as a model to Kidman who cut a key from it which they used to open the safe door. They took out the silver and locked up again. Nobody knew anything about it till the Provost returned weeks later. King's college offered a reward of one hundred guineas but without effect. The stolen silver was stored in a dry well in Kidman's cellar. The robbers tried to melt bits down and recast them as coins but that was not successful, so they ended up selling it to a chap named Cohen.

All stayed quiet for a while, then in September 1798 Grimshaw let himself into the buttery at St Catharine's college, used false keys and made off with the booty. Then he let himself into a Fellow's room at Trinity and stole all the chap's plate – all this without involving his partner.



Richard Kidman however was planning his next big robbery, one of the most daring in Cambridge history. By trial and error he made himself keys to the great iron gates by the walks of Trinity college. Then on 29th September 1798 – a night when there was a violent gale – he let himself in. He took a large sack with him and filled it with silver. It was so heavy he could hardly lift it, but he got it back to his home unnoticed.

A robbery of this magnitude caused a great alarm. The magistrates at Bow Street alerted and they set Bow Street Runners to search every cart on the turnpike road to London. They also send a body of men to make enquiries in Cambridge. Kidman was a prime suspect. He's suddenly started spending money, he was out late at night "bird catching" and always seemed to be about at odd hours. The police visited his house and searched it – without a warrant. They found tools of all sorts, crucibles and mechanical contrivances, which they were most

interested in, and came away full of admiration for his skills as a clockmaker! He was a good bricklayer, too, for the high constable Mr Wheeler actually leaned up against a wall in his cellar behind which he'd just bricked up the college silver

Despite all their efforts the police could not find a thing. Grimshaw and Kidman became bolder. Emmanuel lodge was robbed, then the Combination Room at Caius, and the butteries at Christ's where they stole various silver pots and other articles. This, admitted Wisken, caused him personally great agitation, since the scullion was responsible for the area. A short time afterwards the robbers were disturbed while breaking into the buttery at Emmanuel college and fled leaving their booty behind.

By now William Grimshaw was getting cheeky. He broke into three private rooms at Trinity by getting down the chimney he was employed to sweep, and carried off the treasure in the soot bag. He'd even suggested to the bedmaker that she should lock all the plate together in one of the most secure closets in the college – having carefully made a copy of the key beforehand!

But all the while they were planning their biggest ever robbery, an enterprise which required all their courage and skills to accomplish.

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Pickwick listened in amazement as John Wisken told of a raid on one of the most famous buildings in the world.

"Kidman didn't want to do it, but the chap Cohen, who had melted down the other plate they'd stolen, kept putting pressure on him – there was gold and silver there just waiting to be taken, piles of it.

"So Kidman and Grimshaw broke into King's college chapel. They got hold of a copy of the key to the outer chapel door and let themselves in – not once, but several times. Once inside they worked on the interior locks, but these being antique and of an unusual construction were a real challenge to Kidman's ingenuity. By the end of a week they had cracked all the locks except one but by now Grimshaw had had enough – he said 'that the place looked so awful, that he trembled every time as if he had the ague', and his panic communicated itself to Kidman. They gave up the attempt and left empty handed.

"But then Cohen started to work on Kidman again – why should he give up just because that cow-hearted fellow Grimshaw had chickened out; it would be a matter of minutes now to get the large candlesticks from the altar. So back he went, on his own this time. He cracked the last lock and saw a box, full of treasure. He picked it up, shook it, then panicked and put it down again, letting himself out without taking anything.

"A day or two later he picked up his courage again and went back once more. This time he brought out silver coins and a locked box that was found to contain gold and silver. Cohen took it away to melt down and the college issued a reward of 500 guineas to be paid on the conviction of the robbers. Of course Grimshaw knew Kidman must have done it, but whether he got any of the proceeds I can't tell you. It seems as if each one of them organised their own jobs without telling the other and kept what they got

“Well you can imagine the outrage in the University and how every other college was taking all sorts of steps to prevent something similar happening to them.. Since the earlier robberies the Master and Fellows of Caius college had caused a closet to be constructed within their butteries. This was furnished with an iron door and further guarded by such other precautions as – they said – ‘were deemed most adapted to render it a place of sufficient security for the deposit of their plate’. It formed one chest within another for besides the iron there was still another door, by which it communicated with the butteries. The buttery door had also a spring-bell attached to it. Despite all this the confederates decided to have a go.

“One night Grimshaw hid himself within the walls of the college and unscrewed the lock of one of the college gates near Trinity Hall. He passed the lock to Kidman who took it home and cut a key for it. Within an hour they screwed the lock back on the door, and nobody knew a thing. They could now get in whenever they wanted. But once inside there were still another three doors to get through, which were even more tricky than those at King’s college chapel. It took six weeks, working every night, and Grimshaw chickened out again. At last Kidman had sight of the treasure. On the final night he made three separate trips carrying sackfuls away and would have done more had not daylight dawned. He took it home and hid it in the usual place – the old well, behind the false wall in the cellar. Now he had to dispose of it.

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Richard Kidman, probably Cambridge’s greatest burglar, had amassed a wealth of Cambridge college plate in the hidden well in his bricked-up cellar. But what was he to do with it?

He received a visit from the man who would help him dispose of his ill-gotten gains, Henry Cohen, a jew, who arranged that he would melt it all down for him. Accordingly Kidman packed up 40lb of the plate and carried it around to Cohen’s house. A week later he took another 50lb, putting it into a cupboard, the next week 50lb more. The trips were getting regular, and there was always a chance he might be seen, or that there should be somebody else at the house when he arrived. So they arranged an excuse for him being there.

It was on his final trip, lightly loaded with just 24lb of plate – having decided to keep just a little back for himself – that things began to go wrong. He arrived, as usual, was admitted, as usual, but then became aware that this time Cohen was not there, but his wife was entertaining somebody else, a man he had worked with at Mr Painter’s the glazier. Kidman immediately adopted the plan they had worked out. “Have you sold your old oven yet, missus” he stammered. “Why no, she replied, come with me and I’ll let you see it”. Off the two of them went into the wash-house, with a candle to light the way. There he deposited his parcel of silver plate and took, in its place, a split-pan which Mrs Cohen wrapped first in paper and then in a piece of dirty leather apron. He then made then his excuses and left.

A few days later Cohen called on him – what did he think he was playing at, did he take him for a fool – where was the rest of the silver! Once this was handed over and safely tucked away in the pocket of his leather apron, Cohen handed over the agreed payment, his final transaction with Richard Kidman complete.

Everything quietened down, people stopped talking about the great plate robbery. But then on 24th January 1801 there was another burglary, when the house of Alderman Butcher was forcibly entered and a considerable quantity of plate stolen. The old suspicions were immediately rekindled. William Grimshaw had been in the house very recently – chimney sweeping, and he was also sweep to the colleges that had been robbed earlier. Police descended on his house in Newmarket Road. The house was searched, without result.

Suspicion now switched to Kidman – he had been spending money, had bought land. He was arrested and subjected to several examinations, 'suggestions' were put to him, and after a week he cracked.

Back went the police to Grimshaw's house, this time they decided to pull it down, brick by brick – and as they did so they revealed hidden cavities, containing the silver stolen from Alderman Butcher, together with various items of college silver he'd not disposed of.

The trial took place at the County Assizes. Grimshaw made no defence. The judge sentenced him to death, at which William broke down, begging for mercy and bringing tears to the eyes of the jurymen. It was no avail – too many colleges had been robbed to allow for any mercy in this world. He was hanged at Cambridge castle on 18th March 1801.

Henry Cohen was arraigned as an accessory – and was acquitted. And as for Richard Kidman – owing to information rendered his life was spared. He was transported to New South Wales for life, but was back in Cambridge within seven years. He settled down to his old job as clock repairer and died in January 1832

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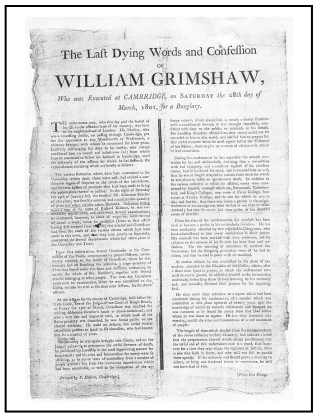
To hang a man for burglary, in a civilised place like Cambridge! It would not happen nowadays, thought Pickwick – and indeed reform had been undertaken just the previous year, 1837. Burglary and highway robbery were no longer automatically hanging offences unless great violence had been used, horse stealing was no longer punishable with hanging – just transportation for life. Now too the judge had more power over sentencing. Whereas previously the penalty for sheep stealing was mandatory transportation for life – even when a shepherd had taken a lamb to support his family – now the judge had power to adjust the sentence to fit the crime.

The old powers had been draconian – though nine out of ten sentences were never actually carried out - and the reforms were welcome in Pickwick's eyes.

But not to his companions in the Butler's pantry at Jesus college. To abolish hanging would remove the ordinary citizen of something everybody looked forward to – a good day out. There was nothing to beat the atmosphere of gathering around the County Gaol on Castle Hill, of waiting for the hour of execution and then actually seeing the villain swing from the gallows …


The Last Dying Words and Confession
OF
WILLIAM GRIMSHAW,
Who was Executed at CAMBRIDGE, on SATURDAY *the 18th day of March, 1801, for a Burglary.*

Actually see him swing? Why of course. Executions were public affairs, lots of people turned out to witness them and to buy the broadsheets that were hawked to spectators – the "Last Dying Words and Confessions …"

His new friend, the porter, had witnessed several in the last thirty years, as he was happy to relate.

"In 1802, the year after Grimshaw was hung, there was a double hanging – William Wright, from Foxton and John Bullock from Bedfordshire were convicted of forging two Bank of England £10 notes. We had thought there would be another, a chap was sentenced for stealing a mare from a paddock belonging to Nathaniel Wedd of Trumpington, but he was reprieved.

Then in 1812 there was William Nightingale – alias Bird. He was a young man, just 29 years old, who'd undertaken his apprenticeship as carpenter and joiner in London, but the business had failed. So he started earning his living by forging banknotes. He'd gone into the Black Lion public house in Silver Street, ordered a dinner and paid for it with a £5 note on the Windsor and Berkshire bank. They took the note to Mortlock's Bank and he said it was a forgery.

Well they arrested Nightingale at Godmanchester, but not before he'd hidden some more of the notes there. He was very worried about those notes, fearing that somebody might find them and get into trouble, so he told Mr Orridge, the Governor of the Gaol, where they were, and he went and got them, brought them back to Cambridge and burnt them in front of him. When they hanged him at 12 o'clock one Saturday there was an immense group of people went to watch.

While he was in the condemned cell he'd become friendly with another convict, Daniel Dawson from Newmarket, & wrote him a long letter, urging him to repent for the horrible crime he'd committed, which was funny since Dawson had just been acquitted. He urged him to seek salvation through the help of the prison chaplain, Rev Mr Pearce. They read the letter out in the presence of all the prisoners just after Nightingale had been hanged – it was really moving hearing the words of a dead man – not that it did him any good.

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Daniel Dawson started out as a groom and later became a tout – sociable fellow and a popular tout, as touts go. He lodged at a house in the High Street at Newmarket. In 1809 two horses died suddenly, others were seriously ill & it was found that the water in certain troughs used for racehorses belonging to J. Stevens, had been poisoned. The Jockey Club offered 100 guineas reward to find who'd done it. Nobody was found.

Then in 1811 Dawson turned his attention to Lord Foley's 'Pirouette', the favourite for the Craven Stakes at Newmarket. This was under the care of Richard Prince, a respectable stable keeper, who had various other important horses in his stable. Poison was put in water used by the string, and in some more troughs on the Heath; four horses died. The water was tested and found to contain arsenic and the Jockey Club offered a bigger reward – 500 guineas.

This proved decisive, Dawson's accomplice turned King's evidence, describing how they'd been to various races, how they'd also administered arsenic to a trough at Doncaster, where two mares had been destroyed. How they'd attempted to poison Lord Darlington's Rubens, which won the Pavilion Stakes at Brighton in 1809

It seemed Dawson hadn't wanted to kill the horses, just to slow them down so that his friends could win big money by backing the field against the favourites. Just as the evidence seemed overwhelming he was acquitted on a technicality. Well the whole court was in uproar. Dawson's relief was short-lived, he was arrested & accused of poisoning on a mare belonging to William Adams of Royston, one of those that had died in 1809. This time there was no mistake, he was convicted and sentence to death.

It was not the end of the story. Lord Foley, who had lost several horses to Dawson's activities tried to save his life, petitioning the Prince Regent who in turn lobbied the judge. But he decided the convict did not deserve Royal mercy. Dawson applied to leading members of the Jockey Club but, not surprisingly, they did not respond.

On a Saturday in August 1814 he was led from the Castle to the top of the front gateway, when the new gallows had been erected. There he prayed for twenty minutes – perhaps Nightingale's words had an effect after all – then he was launched into eternity in the presence of an immense concourse of spectators, many of whom had come from a considerable distance. It was a good day out, except for one thing – he made no last-minute address to the onlookers. A couple of days later his body was interred in St Giles' churchyard

You might say that his execution it was a weight lifted from the Jockey Club – whose weights had actually been lifted back in 1835, as Wisken recalled. "It was one night in July when James Goody, found the door to the Jockey Club room had been broken open and various horse weights were missing. In the early hours of that morning Thomas Hobbs found a horse and cart all on its own near Stetchworth. He took it to Mr Easton's stable – but by morning that had been broken open and the cart gone. The turnpike keeper at Stetchworth said how he'd been knocked up by a chap asking after his missing rig, and told him where it was. Then William Beldam, who drives one of Marsh and Swann's wagons was stopped on the road by a chap who gave him a heavy parcel to deliver to London – of course when the parcel was opened by the police it contained the missing weights. They soon caught the chap who did it, because the man who'd put the parcel on the wagon was the person whose name was plastered all over the abandoned cart. Right robber Edward Haycock turned out to be – got twelve month's hard labour for his pains."

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It was three more years before Cambridge folk had the opportunity of watching another execution at Cambridge castle. The details are recorded in a handbill produced by Francis Hodson, printer of the Cambridge Chronicle, which Pickwick acquired for his scrapbook. It reads as follows.

"The Life, Trial and Confession of John Scare, Who was Executed at Cambridge, on Saturday, April 5, 1817, For a Burglary, at Whittlesford.

John Scare was born at Whittlesford in this county in 1796, consequently he was only 21 years of age when his life became justly forfeited to the offended laws of his country. His father, who was a labourer, has been dead seventeen or eighteen years, and his mother married a second time.

At about thirteen years of age he was put out apprentice, by the parish of Whittlesford, to Mr Pont, gingerbread baker, of Cambridge. During the time he lived with his master, his conduct was extremely bad. On one occasion he set fire to his slop which was hanging in the bakehouse, at about eleven o'clock at night, by which the staircase was much burnt, and the whole premises in danger of being consumed. He was not prosecuted for the offence, there being no legal proof of his having done it wilfully.

Various articles were at different times stolen from out of the house, but in so artful manner that although there was strong suspicion of Scare being the thief, there was no positive proof of the same. However, after he had served upwards of two years, the fact of his having stolen some cakes appeared so clear, that his master taxed him with the robbery, as well as with several other thefts.

Soon after which Scare ran away, but was apprehended at Whittlesford and brought before a magistrate at Cambridge, by whom he was committed to prison, where he remained ten or eleven days.

On being released, he went back to Whittlesford, and was employed as a labourer, principally in the oil-mills at that place, where Edward Stone, whose house he robbed, was likewise employed. He afterwards worked at Shelford Mills, and was married in May last to a young woman at Shelford, with whom he lived but a few days.

Scare was charged with having committed two other capital offences after the robbery at Stone's house; one of which was breaking into the dwelling-house of Mr Maynard, at Whittlesford, on Sunday 2nd of February, and stealing sundry notes, money, and a silver spoon, altogether value £19; and the other was breaking open an uninhabited house at Triplow, on the same day, stealing sundry articles, also maliciously setting fire to the said house in three different places.

He had been known to the inhabitants of Whittlesford and the neighbourhood some time previous to his apprehension; and as it was known he carried a loaded pistol about with him, no persons dared to apprehend him. However on Sunday afternoon, the 2nd of February, as he was sitting in The Swan public house at Foulmire, Mr Rickard, constable of that parish, went behind him and caught hold of both his arms, whilst another man who was close by snatched his pistol out of his pocket, and with the assistance of some other persons, secured this desperate offender, who acknowledged that it was his intention to have shot any person who attempted to apprehend him. He was taken before the rev Mr Leworthy, by whom he was committed to Cambridge Castle on the following day, charged with a burglary at Whittlesford as well as the two other capital offences above mentioned"

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The “Life, Trial and Confession of John Scare” goes on to recount the details of the robbery at Whittlesford in 1817 and how Edward Stone had returned home after midnight to find his windows had been forced open, his chest of drawers and his box upstairs both ransacked, and £216 in gold, silver and notes stolen.

Mr Rickard, Whittlesford parish constable, gave details of Scare’s confession; how he had met two accomplices, Charles Teversham and William Frost as they walked back from church one Sunday and together agreed to commit the robbery.

“They each had a glass of gin and about seven o’clock they went to Stone’s house, and broke open the window. He (Scare) proposed that one of the others should enter first, he being too large – they neither of them dared on account (as the said) of the ghost which haunted the house. He then pulled off some of his clothes, and put his head and shoulders in at the window, and said ‘now, Mr Devil, either you or I’. He got in and opened the door to the other prisoners who went in – he proposed a light – one of them said that if they had a light she (meaning the ghost) would blow it out. They lighted a candle and robbed the house – they afterwards went into a field, took off their hats, and threw the guineas one by one into them as long as they lasted – he did so by the half-guineas and seven-shilling pieces. Each of them had a bag of silver. They then divided the notes – he gave them four £1 notes each, and kept a £5 himself.”

After the robbery John Scare went down to London. William Frost however was filled with remorse and returned his share of the money. Two days afterwards he left £69.1s.6d. in a bag under Stone’s gate.

When Scare learned of this he returned to Whittlesford and broke into the house again, hoping to get the money back. In this he was disappointed for Stone had given it to somebody else to look after. Frost’s action was to save his life, although sentenced to hang, he was reprieved by the judge, as was the other accomplice, Teversham.

Scare however was shown no such mercy. The Judge, Mr Baron Graham, observed: “You have been guilty of robbing an aged and industrious man of the hard earnings of a laborious life, and the first purpose to which you applied your guilty gain, was to purchase the dreadful implement you wore about your person – a double-barrelled pistol. Probably you would have committed a crime of more heinous nature than the one you now stand convicted of, had not your career been stopt, and which I feel it my duty to prevent”

Francis Hodson, anxious to increase sales of his handbill now recorded the impact the awful sentence had on the doomed man. He was “evidently affected by the solemn address of the learned Judge, although before condemnation he had behaved in a very hardened and depraved manner. On his return to the prison he was visited by the Rev Mr Pearse, the worthy and highly respectable Chaplain, he regularly visited him twice-a-day during the time allowed for the existence of this unfortunate young man in this world, and to whose pious exhortations he was greatly indebted for the change effected in his mind. He attended divine service in the chapel both the following Sundays. On the Thursday before his execution his mother and two sisters went into the gaol and took leave of him. They were accompanied by his wife, whom, however, he refused to see.

“On the Saturday morning he received the Sacrament. He walked back to his cell, accompanied by the Chaplain, who continued with him till near twelve o’clock, when this unfortunate young man was conducted to the place of execution, on the gate-way of the gaol, and after a few minutes spent in prayer, he was launched into eternity, in the presence of a very numerous concourse of spectators”

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In the hallowed setting of the Butler's pantry, Jesus College, the conversation continued about much less godly topics - murder, hanging - and worse. Pickwick tried to turn the conversation to other things, but it was to no avail. Scullion Wisken and Porter Holliday were firmly engrossed in their favourite subject and there was to be no deflecting them

The next name that came up was Tomas Weems, and at this name even Pickwick's ears pricked up. It was somebody he had heard of only a day or two earlier. Weems had confessed his crime to Robert Orridge, gaoler at Cambridge County Gaol, and he had been delighted to share it. The version of the story that had been passed down from him was jotted down into Pickwick's notebook

"I was working with a Mr Andrews in Edmonton at the time and got friendly with a young woman named Maria Woodward. She was the finest woman I ever saw, and I was determined to have her if possible. I told her I was a single man, which I wasn't legally, but was for practical reasons. You see I'd got married some eighteen months earlier when a Huntingdon girl swore that she was pregnant with my child and the parish officers of Gt Staughton forced me to marry her. But it was all untrue - there was no baby, and we'd not lived together since she robbed me of my money & pinched my watch to give to another man

"So I told Maria I was going home to Godmanchester to collect some money that my sister owed me, and that I'd marry her when I got back. While I was down there I met my wife, Mary Ann, and turned on the charm a bit. But really I was plotting whether to cut her throat or hang her ... you get the idea.

"Come the end of the week and I asked her to go back to Edmonton with me. We set off about five in the morning but after walking for just 14 miles and we got near Wendy, she started complaining of being tired. So I said 'Why don't you sit down here in this field beside the road, my dear, and have the bit of toast you've brought for breakfast. I'll lay down and take a nap, then we'll catch the stagecoach when it comes past'. I waited till she'd got a mouth full of

stale toast, then I crept up behind her and got my hands round her throat. I told her - 'You've made my life a misery, now I'm going to be the death of you'. 'Oh. lord' she said - and those were the last word she spoke. I kept on pressing for five minutes till I was sure she was dead. Then I took the garter off her leg and tied it round her neck, put her in a ditch and covered her up with grass.

"I'd have got away with it were it not for that woman, Susannah Bird. We'd met her on the road and she saw us going into the field - and wouldn't you know it she saw me again when I was on my own. 'Where's your wife', she asked. 'I've put her on the stagecoach' I said - making out I didn't have the fare for the two of us. But she never believed me. She got suspicious, and found the body in the ditch. After that she went running for assistance and they arrested me 16 miles further along the road, near Puckeridge"

Thomas Weems breathed his last on the gallows at the County Gaol just after 12 o'clock on 6th August 1818, one more murderer meeting his just fate, and providing a spectacle for dozens of people to witness. But it was after he was dead that the fun really began.

They left him hanging for an hour, then they cut down the body and put it in a cart. People were surprised to see it driven by the sheriff's officers and constables out of the gaol, down Castle Hill towards the town centre. Those running behind saw it go into the Chemical Lecture Room in the Botanic Garden, just behind the Guildhall. The word soon went round that something odd was going on. Crowds of people gathered and those mad women got agitated - and you'll never guess what happened

But Pickwick knew all too well - for had he not already met Sophia and Mary Ann Bones and heard the tale before

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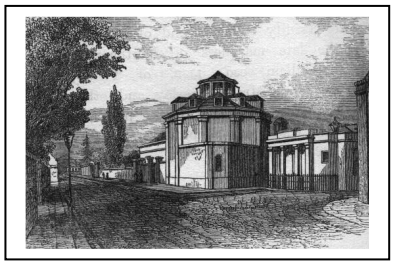
Even though he had some knowledge of what was to come, Pickwick was still disturbed at the detail so assiduously related by his companions in the Butler's pantry, Jesus college

Scullion Wisken, having described how Thomas Weems had been executed and removed to the University chemical lecture room off Downing street now embarked on his version of what happened next.



"They were all ready for him. Professor James Cumming had got his powerful galvanic battery all charged up - the one he got from Profesor Tennant, charged up with sulphuric and nitrous acid. Mr Okes the surgeon was ready with his knives to open up the nerves so that could get a good connection.

"First they connected the wires to his neck and chest and when they operated the battery old Weem's body shuddered. So they made deeper incisions and gave him another dose and he shuddered even more. They were getting going by now and connected the wires to his head - that really made him twitch" - and here Wisken launched into his impression of covulsions, which was so out of character that it made even Pickwick smile and sent porter Holliday into hysterics: "You should do that at one of Sarah Cumming's soirees - she's famous for them. Not that they've got much to smile at for the moment - she

lost her little son with the scarlet fever about three years ago, and they've been having a bad time of it"

Gaiety was regained by further demonstrations of the effect of electricity on Weem's body. "When they attached the wires to his arm that shot up into the air, and he clenched his fist. Then at the end they connected up to his back and you could just see most of the muscles move"

The experiments had it seemed taken and hour and been performed in front of an invited audience of medical gentlemen, members of the University and such respectable inhabitants of the town and county who could procure themselves admission. The rest of the populate was kept well away from the scene, though of course word had soon spread of the marvellous - or monstrous - happenings in the sealed laboratory.

Next day, Saturday 7th August 1819, the body was put on display in the room in which the experiments had been performed. Constables were placed at the gate in Downing street to control the crowds but, in the words of the Cambridge Chronicle as soon as the doors opened at noon "the benches were instantaneously filled with spectators whose countenances bespoke a strange combination of curiosity, disgust and awe. Crowds of every description of persons continually succeeded each other until 1 o'clock, and amongst the many hundreds who came to view the body, no one seemed moved by a feeling of pity for the fate of the criminal, so strong were the grounds of his condemnation"

Once the public spectacle was over the doors were once more closed and surgeon John Okes stepped forward again. Urged on by the privileged few allowed to remain he commenced a extensive dissection of the body, with a commentary on the function of each organ. Perhaps, thought Pickwick, he'd seen this opportunity to make his name in Cambridge medical history, as his father had done earlier with his ministrations to the snow-bound Elizabeth Woodcock. Whatever his motives Oke's had obviously been successful, for, it transpired, he was building for himself a handsome new Hall in the little village of Cherry Hinton. Such a pretty name, but Pickwick was certain there would be something there to distract from tales of murder - and so it proved.

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Cherry Hinton, so it appeared, was a rum sort of place, inhabited by men in their fustian and smock frocks and old women in their red cloaks. There were nearly a dozen public houses and beer houses - Unicorn, Red Lion and Chequers amongst them, which for a population of around 600 people seemed almost generous. They were often filled by men driven out of their cottages by the constant steam and exhalations from wet clothes - and spending a high proportion of their income at the same time. But there was a way to get cheaper drinks, as Wisken confided.

"Couple of years ago the rumour went round tat there was a private still on the go in the village" - a fact corroborated by Porter Holliday. "Well Titterton, superintendent of police, went to Barker's house with several excise officers. They knocked on the door, but nobody answered. So they broke in through the window and found the placed deserted. In the outhouse they found parts of a still, and in the kitchen a copper, which on being put together fitted exactly. Then down in the cellar they found four gallons of faint spirits and, in the drawer in one of the rooms some bladders - all used by persons who vend illicit spirits.

"Then they went into the garden and found a nine-gallon cask of very strong spirits buried under a tree. So they seized the whole lot and brought them back to the police station - just across the way, in Emmanuel road. They left one constable and an excise officer to keep watch on the house and before long a woman went inside, said she owned it but never knew

nothing about any still, because that was all her husband's doings, and he'd left her. Now her father was a tea dealer, Mr English on East Road, so they raided his premises and found several casks of molasses buried underneath some straw in an outhouse"

"Mind you, chipped in Holliday, if they'd wanted to dispose of the evidence they only had to call on old Ezekiel - or was he dead by then?".

"Dead and buried a year before that - but he never drank spirits anyway, he was a water man - and a good one". And so the tale was told Ezekiel Law of Fulbourn who from the age of five years had demonstrated a propensity or insatiable desire for drinking cold water, and continued drinking the amazing quantity of 14 quarts every 24 hours until a short time before his death in October 1834.

A newspaper cutting reports: "He generally took about two gallons of cold water to his bedside every night, and had the same desire for water in summer and winter. If without cold water a few hours either night or day he felt uneasiness in his throat and stomach, and if without it for some time and he drank beer or any other beverage before he had first drank a portion of cold water, it did not agree upon his stomach. Upon a moderate calculation he had drank the astonishing quantity of 35 barrels, 171/2 gallons in a year, amounting to 13301/2 barrels in 28 years"

The practicality of consuming it was one thing, Wisken was equally concerned about the practicality of retaining it. But Holliday enlightened him: "He never discharged more water than people do in general - often he travelled six or seven hours without any inconvenience arising. He even drank his usual quantity of water from the road side if he could not obtain it otherways - never experienced any uneasiness provided he got his cold water. Nor did it affect him in other ways - he had four children, none of whom has inherited his drinking habits. He was a real character - and there's no memorial to him anywhere.

"Mind you, you can't go by memorials anyway, not in Cherry Hinton ..." Oh no, not another account of grave robbing - but no, something odder!

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By now Pickwick was well aware of the interest in his companions for the bizarre and horrible tales connected with death, but this was not a tale of grave robbing at Cherry Hinton as John Wisken related

"It was about four years ago that the parish clerk was taking his usual walk around the churchyard when he saw two graves that didn't look right. Certainly he didn't remember seeing them there before, and they'd been no funerals that he knew of. So they set to and opened them up.

The first one was a poor sort of a grave, never went very far down and had nothing in it. But the other was occupied by a small coffin. When they opened it up they found the body of an infant. Now the deaths of children were nothing unusual in any village, but they didn't generally end up buried overnight. So they called in Mr Abbott, the surgeon, and he examined the body but could find nothing untoward about it - it was just a baby that had died of natural causes. So they set out to discover whose it had been. Somebody knew a married couple in Mill Lane had been expecting a child and they confessed the poor mite had died a few hours after its birth and they'd buried it quietly themselves. But why they did it at night nobody could really make out.

It took people's minds back ten years to what had happened in January 1827, when the curate and churchwardens ordered another grave to be opened - same thing really as the first one,

nobody in it. But there had been - John Golding, landlord of the Boar's Head on Market Hill had been buried there, only he wasn't there now. The shroud and other clothes which he'd been wrapped in were all rolled together and left in the coffin - well if the bodysnatchers had taken them they could have been accused of theft, whereas all they wanted was the body!

And then there was that bit of excitement, January 1837, when those two bodies were found dead in their beds in Occupation Road - two old ladies - a mother aged 86 and her daughter, 57.

John Daffen, who keeps a shop in that area and knew them both. The daughter, Ann, used to go out in the fields and work for the farmers. On the Sunday night, at 6 o'clock, she came into his shop for a pint of ale, a pennyworth of turf, a rush light and a halfpenny worth of sedge - and never paid for them. But she was a good customer, used to come in regular for her laudanum, always about a pennyworth, that she said was needed for her poor old mother who was bed-ridden with a pain in her back and could not rest without the opium. She said she never gave her much, because she knew it was poison. Anyway the next morning he noticed the shutters of her house were still closed at 11 o'clock - that was unusual so he knocked and called out. He thought he heard some reply so he tried the door, but it was locked and he went away. At four in the afternoon the house was still shut up so he got a ladder and broke in through an upper window. On going downstairs and opening the door. There was Ann lying in her bed, covered up. She was dead and stiff. Her mother, Elizabeth, was partly on and partly off the bed - and she was dead too. That was enough for him - he ran off, probably to that still for a stiff drink!

But by now the word had gone round that they'd starved to death. The relievng officer of the Chesterton Union soon was going round saying that the daughter belonged to the parish of Cherry Hinton and that she'd been receiving three shillings a week poor relief for the last two months. The mother belonged to Linton from where she got another three shillings, cash. So there was enough to keep them in what little food they needed.

While the surgeon was doing his investigating the rumours started up that the two ladies were being cut up for anatomical purposes and there was quite a crowd of people gathered to stop him. In the end they were quietened down and the inquest jury decided they'd been found dead with no marks of violence - but the surgeon had found a small bottle of laudanum in the room - some thought that the cause of their deaths, but if it were half of Ely would be killed every week"

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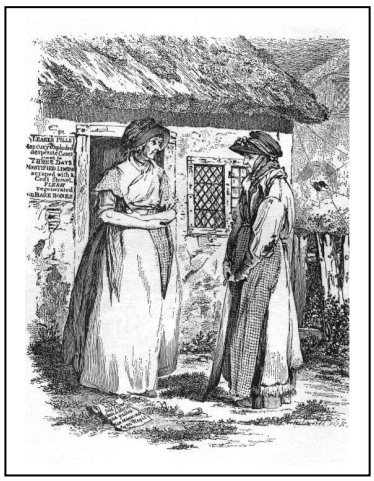
Pickwick had already heard something of life in the fens around Ely, but nothing had prepared him for the account of the desperate measures many of the residents had adopted. Porter Holliday, who had for a while lived in Ely and seen for himself the situation now took up the story.



“The habit of opium eating has grown up because of the great extent to which people are afflicted with rheumatic infection in the fen district. In order to procure some little alleviation numbers of the poor people have recourse to opium as a means of dulling or making themselves insensible to the pain. But from those who used to take it medicinally it has gradually spread to others anxious only to enjoy the temporary stimulant which it affords. Now all the druggists sell it in large quantities – like they do in St Ives, Chatteris and the other fen towns.

“Some say it is an expensive indulgence – laudanum is about 6d an ounce, and opium 2s.3d.- but that’s cheaper than spirituous liquors – so now very little spirits are drunk in the area as opium has entirely superseded it.

“The more respectable of the labouring classes adopt as much secrecy as possible with respect to opium eating. It’s a solitary vice and indulged in for the pure love of the effects which the narcotic drug produces. Many of the wives go to the shops and say they want it ‘for the pigs as they fat better when they’re kept from drying’. One plan they adopt to avoid its being known what quantity they are in the habit of taking is that of going to different shops to purchase it. I’ve been in a shop when a woman came in for a pennyworth of opium or laudanum, and then called for a pennyworth of alcohol, which was 56 degrees above proof, which she swallowed – ‘to take away the taste of the laudanum’

“The usual quantity taken by elderly women – who are generally the greatest opium-eaters – is 30 grains a day, that being a pennyworth. Many will take considerably more than that”

“Its not just in Ely either”, chipped in Wisken, “I’ve spoke to a chemist from St Ives who told me a chap came in and swallowed off at once two scruples of opium – that’s 40 grains. Well he told me: ‘I have been really frightened to see them take it in such quantities, I thought it would have killed them. When they come into the shop I have seen them look very bad, and have asked them it they were used to take it in such large doses, and they said yes. But I certainly thought by the ravenous way in which they took it that they wanted to poison themselves’. I was told of one old lady at Wisbech who was never content with less than 96 grains of opium in a day”

“There’s several persons in Ely”, continued Holliday, “who were formerly in a respectable position, but who have been reduced to the greatest possible distress through having fallen victims to this wretched habit. I remember one chap told me ‘I can’t live without it; we have pawned everything and sold everything we can lay our hands on to get it. There’s such a craving for it that we can’t get over, and its hopeless to try to do without it. A little while ago a friend who knew us in better days gave us decent clothes, but before we’d had ‘em three days they were all pawned. It’s no use, we can’t live without it’

“You can tell confirmed opium eaters by their cadaverous and unhealthy appearance of their complexion, the filthiness and slovenliness of their persons and attire, their total disregard of everything appertaining to decency in their habits, and the dirty and disgusting character of their dwellings.” Them, seeing the impact this was having on Pickwick, he went on to elaborate his account

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“At one house in Benton Square, Ely, which I visited, lay an old woman on one of the dirtiest stump bedsteads that I’ve ever seen”, Holliday continued. “Her person was disgustingly dirty, the wretched covering of the bed filthy in the extreme and the stench of the room was almost overpowering. Hundreds of bugs were everywhere in the dirt and muck of that bed and its occupant.

“I was told that old woman had not suffered herself to be touched with soap and water for the last six years – and judging from the appearance of other members of the family, they’d not pressed her on the subject! No article of her wretched bedding had been cleaned or removed for the same period.

“She was one of the most notorious opium eaters in the opium-eating city of Ely. The exhilarating effects of her last does had passed off and given way to that wretched lowness of spirit in which the life of an opium-eater alternates.

“That poor, repulsive looking hag sat upright in her bed in the chimney corner, her deathly face streaked by the lines tears had taken, making them somewhat less dirty that other parts of her face. Her tangled grey hair hung over her shoulders, her shrunken neck and withered arms were exposed to view as she rolled up another pill of the filthy-looking drug and raised it trembling to her discoloured lips. It was a sight I shall not forget – more loathsome than imagination can conceive or my words can tell

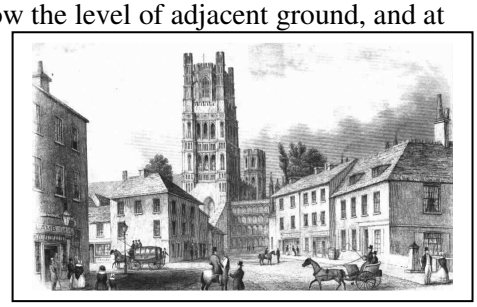
“The only articles of furniture in the room were an old chair or two and a rough-looking three-legged table. Her daughter, 28 years-old, stood by the side of the fire, and two grown up men – her sons – were sitting on an old bench in front of it.

‘I’ve been on this here bed six years’, the miserable old woman told me. ‘I fell down and broke my hip and it wasn’t set. I’ve never been able to get out of this room, nor beyond the side of the bed all that time. I won’t go to the workhouse, I’d rather stop and die where I am’

“But there was no labourer in Ely who earned more when employed than the husband of his woman. The greater part of his earnings, however, are always spent in opium or drink.

“Next to this cottage there was an enormous open cesspool, taking all the garbage and refuse from all the houses in the square. A few yards away was another cottage, with patched-up windows and inside broken chairs, broken ceiling, an old chest of drawers, just one bed and the dirty faces of five young children. They were dressed in rags and had no shoes on their feet and huddled around the pittance of a fire to try and keep warm. The eldest child went to school – a Sunday School, but couldn’t read. Their father was out of work and their mother made what she could by selling matches round the town.

“There’s another part of Ely called Bug’s Hill where the cottages are in the same condition. In Broad Street you see the floor of the houses a food below the level of adjacent ground, and at the back there are heaps of pig and other manure reaching up to the windowsill. You can understand that the rate of mortality in these areas is appallingly high – influenza, scarlet fever, typhoid – you name it, they suffer from it. No wonder people like me are happy to get away as soon as we can, to find what work we can in Cambridge – being a porter is paradise compared to that.



“But then again, some villages are even worse”

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There was one village, it appeared, within two miles of the city of Ely which would in point of filth bear comparison with the worst place in any part of the kingdom. The porter would not identify it more clearly, for apparently his wife’s father used to live there and he returned from time to time to visit distant members of the family who had not forsaken the misery of fenland for the comparative affluence of Cambridge.

Along the entire length of the village street and within a few feet of the doors and windows of the houses, was a slough extending over nearly the whole width of the road, containing and retaining accumulations of decaying animal and vegetable matter, either thrown from the dwellings or flowing into it from adjoining farmyards.

The condition of the dwellings was wretched beyond description. Broken plaster on the walls, creaking door and gaping floors while broken widows stopped up with divers coloured rags

allowed the dense smoke from the every-present fire – needed to ward off the ever-present damp – to find its way outside, though not before blackening everything first.

The damp brick lower floor ensured that the family slept upstairs, a hole in the roof about 14 feet by 10. This contained four beds for the seven members of the family, boys and girls aged from 16 years muddled together as best they may. No wonder fever was ever-present.

Outside it was even worse.

Four upright pieces of wood, not more than four feet in height, with several other pieces laid transversely over the top, supported a quantity of loose straw, which was called the "thatch" of a place dignified by the name of a "privy", the ground being covered by the filth which flowed over out of the small hole intended as is receptacle.

Within a few feet from this was the well containing the liquid which the people drank, its component part being made up of the overflow of the privy, the refuse from the pigsty, the contents of a ditch into which the slops from the houses were thrown, and the spring of the well itself. The water presented a dull and turgid-looking appearance, and its smell was most offensive.

Heaps of pig and other manure lay piled, in some cases, against the walls of the cottages themselves, in others a few feet removed from them. At the back door of each stood a pail or pan, into which the refuse of the house was thrown, and when full the contents were emptied into a ditch close by, the current of which being stopped up caused the most offensive of the contents to be deposited about the road, when they were either absorbed by the soil, or flowed back into the well.

Nobody was, it appeared, more concerned about the situation that the landlord. "The pigs don't get on well", he reported, "the people are too dirty. Its no use my taking it as it is for they owe me £3 for the rent and it won't fetch near what they owe me as it is – its always crying for wittles".

As for the condition of the cottages – they were he claimed, as healthy as any other in the place. Sadly that was probably true for nearly every house in the village was in the same disgraceful condition.

Had it been deep in the fen this might have been expected. But this village was on the healthier, higher land, albeit not many yards from the last undrained fen in the area, Grunty Fen.

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Given the hardship of country life, and the squalor of their dwellings it seemed little wonder that fen people turned to opium to relieve something of their misery. It also alleviated the worst of another affliction – children.

When there was work to be done such as at harvest or gleaning when everybody able to labour was desperate to get into the fields, something had to be done with the little ones. Very often there would be a youngster too small to be carried to work.

So at these times in particular mothers turned to the chemist for a mixture of Godrey's Cordial, which they sold by the pailful. Each druggist had his own recipe but the proportion of opium was about the same. One ounce of Godfrey contained a grain of opium and was mixed with water, sweetened with treacle, a little aniseed, cloves or peppermint water.

When under the influence of this mixture the children lie in a perfectly torpid state for hours together, reported Holliday, who went on to recall what one mother told him. “The young ‘uns all lay about on the floor like dead ‘uns, and there’s no bother with ‘em. When they cry we give ‘em a little of it –p’raps half a spoonful, and that quiet them; sometimes when they’re hungry, and the victuals isn’t ready for ‘em, we give them a drop too. A sufficient dose of Godfrey for a child of three or six months old, to begin with, would be about fifteen minims”.

If the children were being left on their own all day their mothers administered enough of the concoction to keep them in a state of torpor until they returned in the evening. The problem was that once the child recovered from its stupefaction it became uneasy and started to cry – so mother administered another dose, and when that wore off a third. It also had the effect of reducing the child’s appetite for more nourishing fare, until nature could no longer bear up against the barbarous practice. “One doctor from St Ives told me”, reported Wisken, “that hundreds of children are killed in that district by the quantities of opium administered in the shape of Godfrey’s and other cordials”

There was another practice existing amongst the labourers – frequent attendance at the beer-shop. Vast number of them took their meals in the middle of the day in such places, in consequence of the very great distances which they would have to walk to their homes. Many did not need such an excuse to make their way there each evening – well what cheer was there to be had in their own miserable homes, with squealing children and but a small, smoky peat fire in the grate.

Here Pickwick could relate some similar instances from Bedfordshire where of a total of 120 parishes there were 188 butchers' shops, 259 bakers but no less than 883 public houses and beer-shops. It had one small benefit, the Chaplain of Bedford gaol had explained – it kept him in work. Whilst destitution occasionally lead to theft and fraud it was drunkenness which led to destitution.

There was also amongst the labourers a general propensity to theft, when employed in the barns of their employers. They had the constant habit of taking home with them at night small quantities of wheal or barley, either in their pockets or in small baskets, which they saw as a perk of the job. They also pinched sacks that they used either as sheets or to nail over the broken windows to keep the wind – or at least some of it – out of their cottages. Given their situation Pickwick could understand it, but for the farmers the loss of 50 sacks every year was something they could do without

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Whilst the condition of fenland labourers might be extremely poor, there were others who had turned to Cambridge to make their fortunes – or at least a living – without actually meaning to work for it.

It was in their vernacular a “crack town” - a magnet for professional beggars from the Midlands and surrounding district. It was also a gathering place for the Irish who came over to work the harvest fields.

There were, it appeared various lodging houses, to which such people gravitated. Wisken had knowledge of one in particular that he had actually visited in the company of a young man who had worked for a while in the kitchens of Christ’s college.

“The room really a cellar, about a dozen steps below the level of the ground. There was a small passage, having on one side a door leading to the beer cellar, which contained about twenty-four barrels of beer. The other door opened into a room of about 14 feet by 20, in which were assembled a group of the most miscellaneous characters which it could ever be supposed possible to collect together in one focus.

“There were 16 persons in all – men, women and children of all ages. There were two who were on the “sea lurk”, two decent-looking artisans with clean white shirts, their ‘unfortunate companions in distress, and their dear children who had done nothing to deserve it’. Close by stood a widow woman, who had been ‘trying to git a bit of bread by the sale of tattens and driz’ (threads and tape), and her companion who went round with her, with a huge bandage round his head and his arm in a sling – both of which he’d now laid aside, miraculously cured!

“There were the shoeless, the ragged, the dirty, the clean, the lame, and even the blind, young and old – one and all in their varied characters, suited to call forth sympathy or impose upon the charitable and humane

“In one corner of the room was a huge brown pan, called the ‘scran pot’ filled with pieces of bread, beef, mutton and other broken victuals which the company had collected in the course of the day – some from college kitchens. Three or four children and an enormously large cat were gathered round the victuals, selecting some portions for their especial use. One of the children was busily engaged in tearing with his teeth the meat from off a rib bone of beef, another had a lump of bread and cheese; a third was ‘polishing off’ some portions of a fowl. A fourth was throwing lumps of bread and pieces of meat at one of his youthful companions, ‘for he would not eat such stuff as that’.

“In another part of the room six men were engaged in playing cards, and four others in a game of ‘shove halfpenny’. A woman with a comfortable looking flannel gown, who had been out on the ‘clean cadge’ was employed in washing out the dress in which she had been out during the day and which she wore over the flannel one. The other women were variously employed in repairing their ‘pal’s toggery’, some in patching up their own, two making fancy doyleys or various coloured worsted, one knitting nightcaps, another making dolls’ dresses
“The card players were bawling, a ballad singer was practising, one or two women were singing different songs and the rest were talking. The confused noises and the fumes of tobacco, of onions, gin of the wash tub, toasted herrings – not to mention the impure atmosphere caused by 46 persons in a small room underground, heated by a large fire – made the place almost intolerable”.

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Ensconced in comfort in the butler’s pantry of Jesus College Pickwick was just a few yards from Barnwell, the rapidly developing area of the town which was becoming home to poor folk driven from the poverty of the surrounding countryside to find work in expanding Cambridge.

But now it appeared that there was another class of poor folk – beggars, drawn to the town not by the prospect of work, but by the hope of easy money. Wisken had visited them in their cellar, and now described the various classes of scroungers.

“Amongst those present were two or more of each branch of the begging profession. There were ‘highflyers’, ‘slummers’, ‘nakes’, dreary nakes’, ‘shallow go nakers’, ‘sea lurks’, ‘croakers’, ‘sneaks’, ‘tattens and drizzers’, ‘common frizziers’, ‘dreary grizzlers’, ‘dance bloaks’ and others, to one or more of each of which class I was introduced by the lad who

accompanied me. From several of them I succeeded in obtaining some account of their mode of life.

"The first was an Irishman whose appearance was altogether most deplorable. He had no shirt, and his breast was almost entirely uncovered. As for his coat, it is an abuse of words to call the rags that hung together on him a coat; his knees protruded through his trousers, which hung in fringed tatters from below his knees, and his feet were, of course, bare.

" 'Sure then', said he, 'its thirty years I've been on the cadge, and it's a long day too. I never had a home of my own since I came to this country. I have slept in the boozing-kens in the counthry, many's the time; maybe it's been the in the prison I have, and in the workhouse, bad luck to 'em. It's five days since I come to Cambridge; last week I made 14s, but there was two days I didn't go out, it was so hot. To-day I only got 10½d and some grub. Sometimes I work a little in the summer at reaping, but not much; in the winter I always 'pad the hoof'. Sure it's little money we'd get if it wasn't for that, and its better than stealing any day – they'd transport a man for that – but they only 'lumber' you for a moon (a month's imprisonment) for begging. I always work the 'nake', sometimes the 'dreary nake …'"

Here Pickwick was totally confused – what was he talking about. Wisken explained that a nake was someone who begged in a ragged or ill-clothed condition while a dreary nake carried on his operations without shoes or stockings, and this was called 'padding the hoof', or 'padding in on the shallows'

He continued the Irishman's story. "I never did nothing with a 'slum' in my life, since I haven't the larning for that. When I beg I tells the people anything that comes in my mouth. 'Sure it's a cowld day, yor honner' I says sometimes; 'For the love of God give us a trifle', sometimes. When I can make ten or fifteen shillings a week I'm satisfied. One good gintleman gave me 10s a few days ago; another gave me 7s 6d, and one gintleman heaved a sovereign out of his carriage and said, 'There, Pat, go and buy a coat'. Indeed I didn't buy one, for this one does very well, but I wouldn't tell the gintleman so.

Sure we're every bit as honest among ourselves as the rich folks are. I come from Tuam, in county Galway. I don't know how many times I've been 'jigged'; the last I had was two 'moons'. The last four days I was on the cadge I made 10s 9d. I got a lump of bread today, but it's too hard for an old man like me to ate; sure I put in the scran-pot when I don't want it, and the pigs gets it'

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Wisken continued to describe the occupants of the cellar-full of tramps and beggars.

One individual, of considerable reputation for ability among the fraternity, and whose usual occupation was 'pushing the slum' (begging with a petition), told me that he had three 'moons' (months imprisonment) for going on a 'croaker'. He'd carried a petition setting forth that he was a farmer residing in Bottisham & that his cows had eaten a quantity of poisoned berries which had 'by some means got into the cavity of the brain' and produced delirium in the animals, which terminated fatally to the whole of them – and that that circumstance, joined with the badness of the times, had brought him to ruin, his wife to the grave, and his family to the workhouse. For this he was taken up as an impostor and received three month's imprisonment.

As soon as his term had expired he went to Hertfordshire where he met with a pal. As they were walking along the banks of the Lea, some accident occurred to a barge coming down the stream, in consequence of which she sunk. The two travellers immediately dressed themselves as bargemen & had a petition drawn up, stating the cause of their distress to be the

sinking of the barge. They attached the name of the owner of the barge to the petition as having given them a sovereign – and drove a very successful trade on the sunken barge, till they were apprehended and got three months in Hertford gaol.

Recently he'd been again in Cambridge gaol for being 'asthmatical and subject to fits on the street'. Upon this occasion he was on the 'shallow-go nake', and was standing up against a wall in Bridge street without shoes and stockings, and with nothing on but his trousers and a tattered shirt, and a handkerchief tied round his waist. After having shivered and coughed for some time without attracting much notice, he fell down as in a fit. Doctor Okes came up, felt his pulse – and pronounced him an impostor. He was taken into custody and received fourteen day's imprisonment.

As soon as he came out he took up the appearance of a gentleman farmer, dressed in hunting coat, top boots and buckskin breeches. He hired a fine-looking horse and went round the various farmers and gentry in the neighbourhood with the following tale. 'I have taken the liberty of calling upon you on behalf of a very old and valued friend of mine, a gentleman who farms upwards of 500 acres within a few miles of Cambridge. From various causes - which it is as unnecessary as it would be painful for me to mention, he is present in embarrassed circumstances. His high sense of honour, and the feeling that any application for assistance from his neighbours would be attended with disgrace prevents him from calling personally upon you, and also prevents me from stating his name. I have headed the list myself with £10; several others have given various sums, and I would be happy to take your name for any amount you may feel disposed to give, in strictest secrecy'. In three weeks he made himself £50, but was finally taken into custody and spent two months in Chelmsford gaol

Three days after he got out he was back in Cambridge again – this time as a broken-down artisan, selling cutlery to raise enough money to get to the London Hospital for Consumption 'so he might see his poor sister who was very ill in consequence of their mother dying of cholera'. For that he got two more months in Cambridge gaol – he'd just got out the day I saw him. Mind you he told me he'd not take the 'slum' for a while for if he were 'nailed' he would be almost certain to be 'fullered' (fully committed). He was about to make his way to London 'to see how things were going on there' – asked me for a shilling towards his fare!

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John Wisken was continuing his account of a visit to a Cambridge den of iniquity, a haunt of tramps and beggars. But the occupation was by no means the sole preserve of men.

One of the women present was occupied during the day in selling 'taters and driz' (tapes and lace). She informed me that she 'had only made 2s. all day, and some few old ha'pence'. She almost always got more given her as charity than for the goods she sold.

Three men who were in the habit of working together as 'sea-lurks' and diving their earnings, told me they had had a very bad day, and only divided 2s 4d each. These individuals were dressed as sailors, and their tale was always of some disaster connected with their shipping interest, in which they were concerned, and had been either wrecked or cast away, or something of that kind.

The 'highflyers' are generally persons of a somewhat higher-grade in point of education. The two most noted were 'Bath Josh' and 'Soldier Fred'. One of them dressed in an old hussar's jacket, the other in an old tattered red coat. Their principal employment consisted of drawing up the 'slums', or petitions, for those who may require their service in that capacity. The

facility in which they can imitate the handwriting of persons is astonishing, and I know of several instances in which gentlemen were unable to pronounce the imitations of their names to be forgeries. The usual prince for a 'slum' ranges from 1s to 2s.6d, depending on the length and character of the document.

Of course they can also write letters on behalf of the rest of the community, though a few of them can write for themselves – and here Wisken produced a document which, it appeared he had offered to commit to the post, but had somehow quite slipped his mind. Quite how in comes to be amongst Pickwick's papers is unclear, but it reads:

"Dear Sister and Harry – I send these here lines hoping you are all well, which leaves me at present. I am going to Norwich from here. I have been doing pretty well lately, as I have taking entirely to ankeeing. I work like blazes and nob the horrors for my trouble, although my head is scarcely right this morning.

"I have likewise to inform you that since I have left Reding that I have been a married man, but by some sad mistake I lost my wife yesterday. I hope the child is very well. I have not been to epson races as I thought I should, because the mob that came from Bath races to reding gave me the frightables.

"I started from reding to henly-upon-thames, from there to Leighton buzzard; this is reckoned the best beer in England, and well I know it; from there to Bedford and from bedford to saint notes, where I got locked out from my dear wife, and was the occasion of me having the price of some fourpenny in the morning as she begged the breakfast while I laid down for an hour.

"She was a Lovely creature, but short of teeth, and troubled with saint antnony's dance, which please me very much to see when I had nothing to do. I am now single, but much against my will; untill I reach norwich, where I hope I shall have the opportunity of once more embracing the charms of Matrimony. I have turned quite sure its all right.

"I should like to have an answer, but I'm not settled in my mind where I shall be in norwich on account of Whitsuntide been so near. I have nothing particular to mention here, no more than hoping you are well. So no more at present from your affectionate Brother"

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The life of a tramp was not wholly without pleasure, as Wisken disclosed.

After I had remained in the apartment some time, and the dinners and suppers of the various parties had been disposed of, it was suggested they should have some singing. Accordingly a number of songs were sung, many of which, by a more select audience, might be considered objectionable; but the more obvious and indecorous the allusions, the more general were the marks of approbation of the company, males as well as females.

On another occasion nearly the whole of the evening was occupied by the trial of a prisoner for murder – the company having formed themselves into a criminal court for that purpose. Seated in an elevated position on one of the tables sat the judge; he had on a woman's red cloak, a white collar turned over about his neck, an old grey Welsh wig upon his head, and a pair of woman's cuffs tied round his wrists. He conducted himself throughout with all the gravity peculiar to the high and important station which he filled.

The prisoner was arraigned at the foot of his table and on each side sat learned counsel, each of whom was robed in a woman's black dress, with white collars round their necks. On one side sat twelve jurors and opposite were forms for the accommodation of those who represented the public.

The door was guarded by one who acted as a policeman, and there was an usher of the court with a wand of considerable dimensions, who kept silence while the proceedings were going on.

The prisoner, summarised Wisken, was accused of having murdered a drinking partner following a squabble in a beer house. Evidence was given by a variety of "witnesses" and the verdict of the jury was Guilty. The judge put on the black cap and passed sentence of death. The court broke up, and preparations were immediately made for carrying the sentence into execution. The crowd of gazers to witness the execution was assembled in the lower end of the room and the procession formed in the adjoining beer cellar – the clergyman, the sheriff, the hangman and other officials, all represented. The culprit was let to a chair upon which he stood; the rope was adjusted and made fast to a hook in the ceiling.

Everything was in readiness for drawing away the chair from under the man, when a loud knocking was held at the door, and a messenger arrived with a reprieve, the announcement of which was received with the most rapturous applause, and the mock tragedy, with all its detail ended by an order for an abundant supply of warm ale and gin, and other beverages.

It was obvious that Wisken had been deeply influenced by the occasion, having fully believed that he had been about to witness an execution in even closer detail than he usually enjoyed at the County Gaol. In the butler's pantry glasses were refreshed and the chat turned effortlessly from make-believe to reality. But that reality once more turned to murder and hangings and, keen as he was to record such detail, Pickwick began to feel uneasy - a combination of the subject matter, the confined quarters and the excellence of the wine.

He sought leave to depart and was escorted courteously to the gatehouse of Jesus college and walked – or almost floated – down the chimney, back to the bustle of Jesus Lane. Turning his back on the town he directed his feet towards the open commons beyond which he could catch a glimpse of the sails of barges, and there on the top of a commanding hill the building which could only be the county gaol. Having heard so much, he must see for himself.

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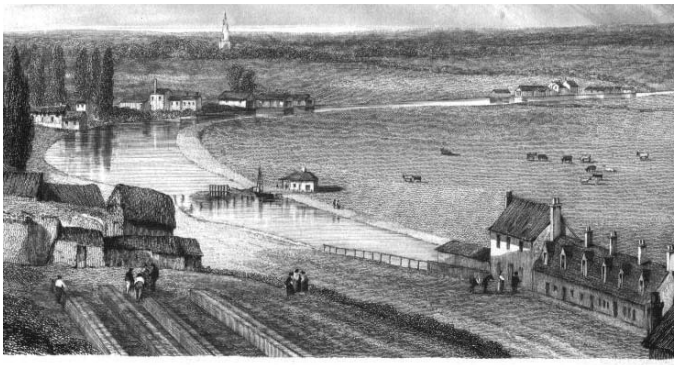
The common land that separated Jesus college from the river was rough grass and in places covered with street sweepings and other rubbish, dumped in piles by the scavengers carts and then being spread over the ground.

"About time they got round to doing something here", said a voice from behind him, "the state of these commons has been a disgrace for years. I've know water lay over this land up to the horses' knees, and even when some of it drains away there are places where it lingers in hollows, encouraging bugs and smelling to high heaven. Now at last they're starting to fill the low bits



in, but you still need to know your way across at least during winter months."

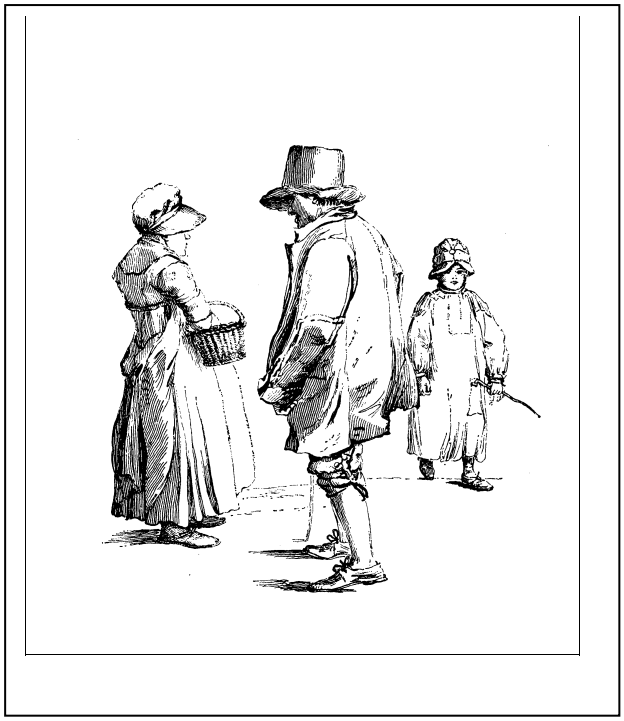
Turning, Pickwick introduced himself to the young man standing behind him, who, like himself it transpired was making his way to the prison on the hill. His new acquaintance had been away from Cambridge for some time but had no hesitation in striking off diagonally to the right – away from their destination and towards a public house beside the river – the Fort St George in England. This was, it appeared, the only place where one could cross the river without going round via the Great Bridge.

As they strolled, carefully avoiding the cow pats which interspersed the piles of rubbish so Pickwick learnt something of the life and times of Henry Pamment.

"Picture a woodman's cottage, situated by a running brook, honeysuckle climbing over the porch. A garden well stocked with fruit and vegetables, around it pig sties, hen houses, bee hives and in front a huge sycamore tree which in Spring provides a large number of rooks – for pies. All around green pastures with no other houses, apart from the Hall – Barham Hall, near Linton

That's where I was born, just 32 years ago, on the evening of the Harvest Home. My dad, the woodman, had just joined the other workers at the Hall and was just going to sit down to supper when he was summoned away to fetch the doctor. Not so very pleasant to leave the plum pudding and roast beef, to run puffing and blowing, merely because such a chap as I was coming – not that I remember much about it!

The first thing I do remember for myself was being breeched. I was a red-faced ruddy little fellow with my head covered all over in black curls when a gentleman from Cambridge took great notice of me and called me Harry Twopenny. It was he made me a present of a little jacket and trousers covered with three rows of bright buttons and two deep pockets, which I soon began to make use of for it being Sunday when I first sported them I went with my father to Linton. And there the pennies rolled in from all quarters, ticker and faster till I could scarcely waddle from the weight of my pockets. Then on returning home we met the Lady from the Hall who at



once recognised me in my new attire with the shining buttons, frilly shirt and black ribbon tied in a neat bow – yes and a cap with a tassel – and she gave me a whole shilling.

I went to the village school kept by an elderly matron and her daughter and I learned my lesson well – 'you are the best boy among them', she said of me, and I used to very often get a penny for bringing a swish stick for the dunces. Then I went to a boys school where the tradesmen and farmers' sons were educated, but here I was always kept back for two reasons. The one was I was neither a farmer nor yet a tradesman's son, and the other I don't think my schooling was paid for regularly. On the Sabbath I went to Sunday school to learn reading and the catechism and the Minister took great notice of me, let me have the first pick of the books and inviting me back to his house after service to read to the ladies in the study".

175a

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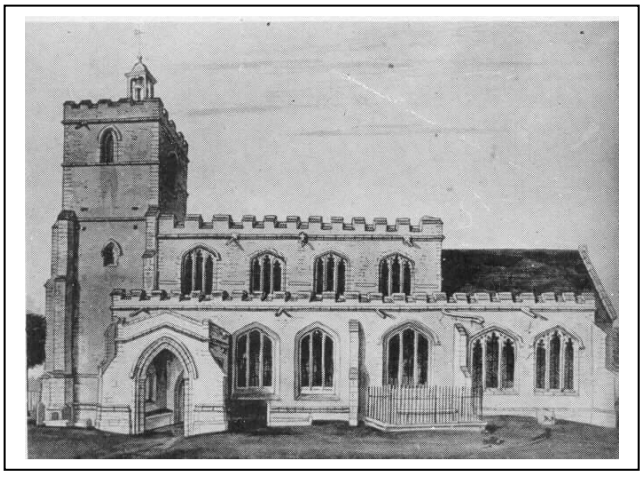

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176

Life had been sweet for the young Henry Pamment of Linton in the early years of the 1800s. But then it was time for him to start earning a living. As his mother kept fowls and turkeys he was given the job of making sure they kept on stubble fields. He kept pigs for other people, went out bird scaring and helping his father who was woodsman at Barham Hall, as his father had been before him.

"I used to go out in the morning with my father and brother in the winter, and never see a fire all day. Dinner was a piece of dry bread with an onion to coax it down". At night he would take a faggot into Linton which he would sell for twopence and then go to evening school which he paid for himself. "I learnt more there than I had done at school and should have got on better, but there was several indifferent young men so that bad order was kept".

Later the boy helped his father with the accounts and his other duties, one of which was to look round the wood and see there were no trespassers breaking in and stealing the faggots. But his father never took a person into custody in his life, although it was notorious that wood was being stolen. His son was of sterner stuff and was later to be appointed as keeper.

"Knowing every twist and turn of that wood, as I did from childhood, it was impossible for anyone to be there any time without being seen and in less than a week we had above forty names of people that we had caught trespassing -–but was only warned off. Once I caught a gentleman farmer, who became so angry that he threatened to shoot me – he was a bad enemy who got his revenge later".

Then things started to go wrong. The Hall was sold, the new owner wanted changes – "there was not time enough to get out for one half of the house was pulled down first, and we still lived in the other. We was obliged to take a place in the village – up a cobbler's yard, one of the worst of cottages – cold and damp, no garden, scarce yard enough to keep a pig or swing a cat round, no conveniences – but double the rent".

Then his father was thrown out of his job in the middle of winter. "I never saw the tears run down by father's cheeks as they did that night – driven out of his beautiful cottage, now living in a crowded village up a yard and at double the rent. Yes and in his old age to lose his situation and have to apply to the parish for work amidst the sneers of the worthless – I thought he would have broken his heart". Henry too had to go on the parish. It was a cold and frosty morning near to Christmas when he went to the Overseer – the very farmer he had caught trespassing. "You want employ, I thought you was minding the parson's pheasants – ah well – now you can go into the fields and pick stones for the sum of 6d for twenty bushels"

This was the very worst of parish work, to go on the land in the middle of winter and gather stones. "We had a sack apron that we held down with one hand while we fumbled them out of the ground with the other, and when we had gathered a peck we made a heap of them – which let me tell you are very heavy to hang before you and carry. But look at the weather. If it was frosty the ground was hard, we could not get them up and my poor fingers, the ends of them, used to crack and bleed with cold. And when it was wet the ground clogged up to that degree that it was fit to pull your legs off from your body – and the most we could earn was two shillings a week!"

Shortly afterwards the parish agreed to give the lads 1/6 a week and let them do what they could. Henry made his own way, a bit of gardening, a bit of wood work, cleaning boots. He

was soon bringing in 4s a week, enough to pay for his lodgings and put a little aside for clothes. Then harvest time beckoned.

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Strolling over Midsummer Common, Henry Pamment recalled his first harvest.

When harvest come I thought I'd go and do a harvest. My chummy told me where I could get a harvest if I wanted one, so I went at night to see farmer Gilbert – my old chap knew him so he came along with me. So away we go and stood in the front of the door and he saw me and came out and I touched my hat and said 'Please sir I've come to hear about the harvest' 'What are you – Pamment?' 'Yes sir' 'So you think you can do a harvest?' 'I think p'raps I could' 'Yes you can do a harvest'. 'When you going to begin' 'About Monday or Tuesday'. 'Alright'. Then he wanted to know if I'd have half a pint of beer. I told him I was a tee-totaller.

Tuesday night a boy came and told me Mr Gilbert was going to begin harvest in the morning so Wednesday morning I got up soon and met Joe, for he was going along to do a harvest for farmer Gilbert too. We went to the blacksmiths and bought our scythes – three & six each – and they weren't good neither, I slit too that harvest. I got a pair of gauntlets and a big straw hat from the shop. We went back to the blacksmiths to grind our scythes. All the gang were there – lord and all – some of them fitting new sticks to the scythes and some of them putting in tacks and some of them making grass nails and fitting them.

Joe and I began to hang ours, after we ground them, so I took my Fanny – we always named them after our fancy girls or wives, and I hung her. Joe he hung his full length, but I took mine in two inches. There was a younker there that couldn't hang his so I say 'I'll hang it for you Josh'. 'Do bor', he say. I hung it and he took it and said 'Ah bor I can mow with that'

After that them that drunk beer went to the pub to wet the job till fourses time and then away we go with our baskets strung on the end of our scythes and our reap hooks in our hands. We went into the piece to make a beginning

Bor that were a bad piece. There were thistles and dindles and foul grass and clover– we didn't like that. The lord he cut in first. He started in the gate and he began to cut. We always round off the corners for the cutter. We set down our things just inside the gate. There were eight of us beside the lord and his chummy what tie up after he start in. We cut two or three sheaves and tied them up – just to make a beginning, and then we took off our guddles and rub bags and laid them together and covered them up with wheat so that shouldn't rain – that was unlucky to leaves them rubs uncovered. If you do that would be bound to rain. There was a lot of swifts flying into windward all that harvest. We don't like that no wise – that almost always brings rain that do

Next morning we begun in earnest. Five o'clock. We started in and cut the corner round with the scythe. Bor that were a bad piece. There were a lot of funky places and all – it was 'Here come Mr Funky' all day – that 's where it gets beaten down by the rain. 'That cut none too fit', says Joe. 'That's rather ripe – that might have been cut a'fore,' say another. 'Am I to have this spell, or will you' I ask Joe. 'I think I'll have the first spell mine's a new scythe, I want to get her an edge'. 'How does she do it' I asked as I was taking off after him. 'I think she'll come to an edge. I think you'd better have a whet'. And so we'd turn up and sharp, then start on again a little bit further. Then I say 'Let me have a try to see how she hang' and he said 'alright, I'll have another sharp then you can have a try.' He'd stop and sharp and I'd take her and mow a stroke or two – 'Bor that hangs like a fiddle, I think though she's liggging at the point a little. Where are our other chummies'. There they be, they're holding up their hands – beer-o. We'll go and get some cocoa

The lad from Linton continued with his account of harvest operations.

Time we're after that the cutter comes and the lord get up on it. He started on the left side of the piece and go round and round to the right till he come up with nothing. We had to follow and tie up directly the cutter started. And then I say to Joe 'Here comes your breakfast – and there's old Chapman's woman too – and here come my sister with mine – that's half-past seven, look at the sun'.

And my sister come up – 'mother sent a jug of tea, some fried eggs and a piece of toast and bread and butter'. We always have half an hour for breakfast, and when time was up the lord get up and finish things off and say 'Finished me lads' – 'Yes we're done' – and away we go. And so you'd go on to the middle of the forenoon and some of them would stand and holler – 'beer-o' – but we always drink cocoa.

So we go on tying up till noontime when away come the wives and the little girls with the dinners. Then we make a little house with the sheaves and start to get our dinners at half after twelve. Some of them had light pudding s with meat, some beef dumplings and vegetables, some apple dumplings. Then we'd used to yarn and we single men used to carry on with the women, - some would talk about going to bed, and some of their fowls and some of their dogs and others of the master.

Half after one the lord would get up and off things and away we'd go. And so we'd go on till fourses – and then away would come the old girl with fourses at half after four to five – most of the old girls would come because they'd done work at home. They'd bring baked pears, apples, bread and butter, cucumbers and plum cake. We used to get under a lea and they'd be some games I can tell you. One old woman would get laughing at her old man. Some as had two or three children would laugh at them that had none.

We was allowed half a hour for fourses and after that we wouldn't cut no more. Some of us would go shocking, and some of them racing to see who could get to the end first, shocking up, whilst others hauled in sheaves. We'd stop till nine o'clock shocking. And after that we asked the lord 'What time in the morning'. 'Well', he say, 'that all depend on the weather. If that's a dry morning we'll be here at five'. 'Aye aye' we all say. And then he say 'John you go and get the horse up of a morning and I'll come and help you to yolk'. 'Alright', John say, 'four o'clock?' – 'yis'. And then he'd say 'Night y'go lads. 'Night y'go we'd answer and off we go home.

That was a hard work, confessed Henry Pamment, but I had no more intention of leaving Linton than I had of being made King. But then in 1823 one of my cousins came and said he was going to what he called the London side to haymaking, and would I like to go with him. I at once said I should like to go to London and accordingly without consulting with either father or mother I made up my mind to go.

Now then I had to get my few things together and took up my little money and the next morning, which was Saturday, at three o'clock I had to start – but where and what for, and what with? Why to the borders of this great metropolis, the seat of everything that is good and everything that is evil. But had I any say where to come to – no. Had I anyone to recommend me to work – no. How much money had I – 12/- and a crown piece that I left at home. But the morning comes, my father calls me at 2 o'clock, my things in a bundle was under my arm. I then went into my mother and father in their bed room to wish them goodbye and I think I

hear their united voices now, saying ‘God bless you boy, take care of yourself, we shall be glad to hear from you …’

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In 1823, at the age of 17, Henry Pamment had turned his back on his native village of Linton, and at 3 o’clock in the morning, with 12/- in his pocket and a bundle under his arm, set off for London – nearly 50 miles on foot - with his cousin for company.

“A hard day’s work it was, but we arrived at our journey’s end at about eight in the evening and I could have laid down by the roadside to rest”, he told Pickwick. But they still had to seek out their lodgings and there was no getting to bed until midnight.

“But we was up in the morning to try our luck for work, and fortune smiled upon us for at the first gentleman’s house we applied at we obtained work at haymaking and received 12/- per week, and four pints of beer a day – for by then I’d forsaken my former tee-totalism. And very comfortable we were”. After haymaking he was retained to work in the garden, but after a while began to think of his birthplace, his parents and home. Then his brother called: “He said which would you rather do, go back to the country or go to London to get a place – I at once said London, for I had seen too many cloudy days to have any great wish to return to Linton, barring seeing my parents”.

His brother obtained him a post with a fruiterer who had an orchard a little way from London. “I had to attend Covent Garden market, besides look after the horse and cart and sometimes work in the garden. I‘d always been brought up in the country and thought that people in London could not work harder than country folk – but I was wrong. In the country they have a time in the morning to start and a time to leave off in the evening, a time for meals – if they have any to eat – and six days make up the week, Sunday is with most a day of rest. Now I found I was up at four o’clock in the morning and did not finish till ten or eleven at night. I had to work all Sunday till four or five at the business and then go down a back yard to clean a lot of dirty knives and forks and seven or eight pairs of dirty shoes, which neither had been brushed since the last Sunday. To have to be on the Sabbath in this degrading drudgery was more than I could bear … I used to burst into tears”

But Henry stuck at it and learned to cope. One Sunday afternoon he finished early and took a stroll up Oxford Street when he saw a face he recognised – it was the housemaid. Together they strolled around Hyde Park and the friendship ripened. “Twelve months later we were married, unknown to any of our friends”. His wife stayed in service for a year, he continued at his job for three. Having no children of their own they took a little girl to nurse.

Then circumstances changed. He quarrelled with his master and left his job. Shortly afterwards his first son was born. He bought a horse and cart and sold produce by going round with it, for a while all went well, but then trade slackened off. He took a shop with a mangle

attached, which brought in a comfortable living. “But I had no extra luck. I lost my horse and my eldest child and had a very severe fit of illness myself, and a very expensive one”. But they struggled for a few more years, took a second shop and did fair business. But then things turned against him once more.

“Our family increased and was very unhealthy. We had three children at one time that could not walk and my wife’s health was so bad she could scarcely crawl about, and myself affected with an internal disease – after being under different doctors at the hospital for two years they left me as they found me”. They lost their house and their pigs. Customers and friends deserted them. Henry’s thoughts turned again to country life in his home village of Linton, they decided to return. It was to prove a bad decision.

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If life in London was harsh, life back home in Linton was worse – as Henry Pamment related.

“With my little savings I bought a house, but it took six months before I could get possession, in the dead of winter. We had nothing to do or could do towards a living and was eating up what little we had. Then when we got in one part was a bakehouse and oven which was out of repair and cost a great deal to rectify – and what was worse did not answer when done”.

But it was his home village, there were plenty of relations – “which appeared very kind at first while there was anything to be got out of you, but no sooner did we begin to sell something than they got into our debt, left of dealing, tried to spite us in every day, slandered, backbited, tried to prevent others dealing with us too – everyone seemed to think we had no business here. Add to this whatever we purchased did not seem to turn out well, I had a great loss with some pork, and as for my pigs they all seemed to lose me money”.

On the brighter side their health improved, but “I look around me and see my family wanting clothing and feeding. I have every expense in the parish to pay and wasting pound by pound and shilling by shilling what it has taken the prime of our life to scrape together – yet our customers are trying every means to get into our debt and cheat us through thick and thin”.

He bought some land, which proved to be a millstone round his neck, and then was made parish constable for two years in three, no wonder, he confessed he sometimes “get a little drink and don’t know what I am about”.

Indeed of all his trouble that of having to be constable seemed to be the one that pressed on his mind most. In rural districts the post of parish constable was most unwelcome, people being appointed against their own wishes. The constable was often a small tradesman – as in Pamment’s case – nearly upon a level with, and neighbours of, the very persons who most required the vigilance of the police. People such as publicans and beer-sellers. But a constable who was also a shopkeeper depended on them and the labourers in their own occupations and were in fear of revenge or retaliation should they perform their duties too strictly – and had not Henry already told Pickwick of his zeal when a young gamekeeper and how this had started him on the road to poverty.

There was little in the way of remuneration for the duties involved. And in the darkness of a Linton lane the constable's carved baton, his symbol of office, would be little real protection from a group of determined assailants. It was no wonder the county was apparently experiencing a period of relative peacefulness, for who in such circumstances would not turn a blind eye to trivial crime – especially given the extremity of the law's retribution.

But the constable was not the village's only gaoler – there was also the village pound. To that fine bricked enclosure wandering cows, cunning donkeys or loose colts were taken, to remain under lock and key until released on payment of the proper fee to that most important official – the pindar.

This chap was not a young man and pigs, especially at "shacking" time were occasionally his master. They were very uneasy and restless while imprisoned, whereas the donkeys stood stock still in the sun, almost asleep, with their lower lip dropping as if they were well accustomed to their quarters, and the cows chewed the cud placidly – till kicked by a cart colt. Then a rumpus would ensue in which the pigs took a leading part, getting entangled in the legs of the rest of the community, and finally drawing up in battle array in a corner with their snouts "at the rest" outwards. At times like these the pindar might be found some distance away from the fray, perhaps tucked up in one of the village alehouses – and what constable would be able to drag him away to do his duty.

But it was not always the pound that contained the main pest of the village, as Henry, with a twinkle in his eye began to relate.

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Henry Pamment, the reluctant parish constable from Linton, recounted a tale from another area of the country.

There's a village out near Ely, called Wilburton. It's not bad as the fenland villages go, being a great deal higher, at least in the centre, than many others. And you still have the benefit of the fishing and in fowling round the edges, in places like Grunty Fen.

There was one old chap used to live out that way sixty years ago at Stretham ferry. The area was then just vast tracts of morass, covered with water, and very shallow, except in the drains. His name was Merry – and a merry old man was he - knew everything there was to know about wildfowl. He knew the haunts of the different species of birds – pochards, shovelers, teals, garganics, lapwings – and of course the starlings. During the winter they roosted in the reeds, and there were so many of them they'd break the reed beds down - cause a hundred pounds of damage in one night. Well stocks of reeds properly harvested and stacked would be worth three hundred pounds to the farmer, in them days. They'd use them to thatch with – reeds are much more durable than straw, so you'd see them on good houses as well as cottages. So they get the old boys out to drive them away – you'd always hear the gunshots as they tried to scare the stares off

Anyway Merry knew everything - he knew if a drought had lowered the water just where the fowl were to be found. When he went out on his own in his punt he would lay flat in the bottom, his legs stretched out behind on each side to steady it and a small stalking stick in each had which he'd use to propel himself out to where the duck were. He could get nearly up to them before they realised he was there. Then he'd cock his punt gun, wait for the duck to rise and bang! The force of the explosion would push the punt back several yards – darned sight quicker than he'd gone up to them. Then it would just be a case of collecting the dead duck. Quite how many he'd bring down with one shot I'd be hard pressed to tell you – you always had to take what he claimed with a bit of salt!

There was no doubt that as a marksman he was extraordinarily expert. He had a gun upwards of six feet in the barrel, and that placed in its stock by the village carpenter. Altogether it was a weight which nothing but a most powerful arm could extend and elevate. But with it Merry could kill a snipe flying. Mind you he'd always ask his sportsmen for a fresh charge in lieu of what he wasted on so worthless a bird. The charge of this gun of his was two pipes and a half of powder, and three of shot, and the wadding was a little dry sedge, of which he always took a wisp in the punt.

But he'd make more money by taking gentlemen out with him and frequently while shooting parties with other guides were being towed in their punts all over the area, Old Merry was steering his punt silently to the scene of the action. In the fogs, which were so thick as to exclude the sight of objects at the smallest distance, or even in the dark, he knew how to proceed in the morning and return at night.

From long habit his eye and ear were both singularly keen at the approach of wildfowl in flight, and his gun generally verified the truth of his observation, whether fired in the twilight or in the fogs. His caution to look out at the coming of the birds was so exact that no person could ever complain of want of shots if they obeyed his direction. His knowledge in seeing the wildfowl fly, to what particular spot they would direct their course, was accurate, and his punt was certain to be either in a direction to intercept them in flight, or to be concealed among the reeds close to where they assemble to feed at eve or morning.

Old Merry had not been much troubled with education. He was as rude as the country in which his occupation lay, but he had an innate civility and evenness of temper which few could ruffle – and was especially good at coming up with amusing stories for his employers.

But if you got somebody as strong as him who decided to turn awkward, then the parish constable was in for a bit of problem – and that's what faced them at Wilburton.
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As they continued to avoid the cowpats on Midsummer Common, Henry Pamment, sometime holder of that most onerous of parish offices – that of constable – continued his account of the trials and tribulations such office brought.

"Wilburton village had a right pest, born and reared in the place. Some said he was an idiot, some that he was insane, some that he was just devilish cunning. He was short in stature, and square, inexpressibly dirty in face and fingers. His hair was like tangled tow, and he was deeply pitted with the small-pox, the dirty lodging in the pock marks being an additional disfigurement. His eyes were in a perpetual twinkle, except when they blazed with rage. His hands reminded you of the claws of the badger, and he used them as such.

"As for his dress – well he was his own tailor, but his skill was confined to very primitive art. His clothes consisted of a bifurcated skirt or kilt, being made out of a corn sack, and a jerkin made out of a calf skin united to the skirt at the waist be some butchers' skewers. He was a free drinker, and when not bawling "on the street" was in all probability engaged in some iniquity in the open fields.

"When such was the case and he was discovered, the injured parishioners would hunt him back to the village and call out the constable. Nobody bothered with the usual preliminaries before Justices of the Peace, a sufficient crowd collected, and the delinquent was apprehended, not without much resistance and clamour. He was then forced into the village cage and locked in"

“A village cage?” asked Pickwick.

“Oh yes, many villages have got them – Litlington, Coveney, Stretham, Soham – they vary from place to place. They’re an essential part of the judicial process, somewhere where you can lock a troublemaker up till he’s sober, or there’s time to take him off to the gaol. Most times the inmate will accept his fate – though at Soham one old chap kept thumping on the door and demanding to have a pipe of tobacco. So his mates drilled a hole right through the door, got one of them long-stemmed churchwarden’s pipes and shoved it through. He sat inside smoking, and they kept topping it up with baccy from the outside!

“But back to Wilburton. The village children loitered around the door – they always do when there’s somebody inside. But soon they got worried – ‘he’s been a-thumping the door and a-sweating, and says he’s not a-going to be kept in any longer, and now you can hear him scratting like a rabbit’. Off the children ran, back to their mothers and the news was spread. Soon a small circle of women and old folk collected to watch the escape.

“In the course of half an hour something like a rat appeared from under the foundations, and it was plain that a tunnel had been made. Two hands, or rather claws, were soon above ground, tearing away the earth for the head to follow. Loud cheers of encouragement heralded his progress. The soil began to heave, and then out came the shoulders, divested of the calf-skin jacket. There was a little hitch at the hips and some struggling, during which the timid returned to their cottage doors and the stoutest boy tore off for the constable.

“And where was that worthy individual – where I should have been – gone off to milk his cows in the furthest part of the parish till the madman had quietened down, or drunk himself into oblivion. I believe the poor pest ended his days in the madhouse – which is where I shall end up if I have to stay in Linton much longer!”

“So what brings you to Cambridge”, enquired Pickwick in an attempt to lift his companion’s spirits. “Why what else but arson, hanging and a miscarriage of justice” came the surprising reply.

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Henry Pamment seemed to imply that “There but for the grace of God went I” as his story revolved around two other, Linton men, William Reader and William Turner who were convicted to having set fire to a stack belonging to the parish overseer, Mr Chalk. Henry himself had had experience of the harshness of such officials and that Chalk was obnoxious there was no doubt. Therefore when his barns and other buildings mysteriously caught fire in March 1829 there were few who were really surprised. But the offended local gentry put up a large reward for information on the perpetrators which proved too much of an attraction to William Reader’s brother-in-law.

Thus about a week after the blaze Robert Casbolt brought up the matter in conversation and, in the strictest confidence William gave details of what had occurred – information that the brother-in-law immediately passed on to Mr Adeane, the local magistrate.

That Reader should have confessed seemed strange, for he was by no means wanting in intelligence and had indeed been teacher at Linton Chapel Sunday School. Nevertheless he and Turner, having decided to set fire to something, had decided to get revenge on the overseer. They had gone at night into his stack yard and after lighting some matches with a tinder box they carried with them one had held up a handful of haulm – pea stalks – while the other one lit it, declaring they would be in it together. Within a few moments a barn filled with barley was ablaze and soon the adjoining stacks were on fire.

Having seen the result of their actions the two men ran away, circled through some fields and came back again to help fight the fire. There was no doubt that they had done it, but never the less they were acquitted!

Their counsel pointed out a mistake in the charge – they were charged with setting fire to straw, whereas they had set fire to haulm, which was quite another thing. Then when reviewing the case yet another mistake was found and a group of 12 judges unanimously decided the judgement was unsound. But never the less they were hanged! A new indictment was brought, the trial reheld and the guilty verdict given again.

The two Williams had been "launched into eternity in sight of the largest assemblage of spectators ever witnessed on a similar occasion". They had not been alone for a Chippenham man, David Howard, had set fire to other property at Badlingham in that village.

The crowds not only had three hangings to watch, they could also buy a handbill depicting the scene and containing in rough verse the "Lamentations and contrition of the prisoners on the night before the execution", starting "In this dark and lonesome cell, To-morrow doomed to die. We offer up our prayers to God, For mercy now we cry". But, fortunately for the crowds, that mercy was never shown.

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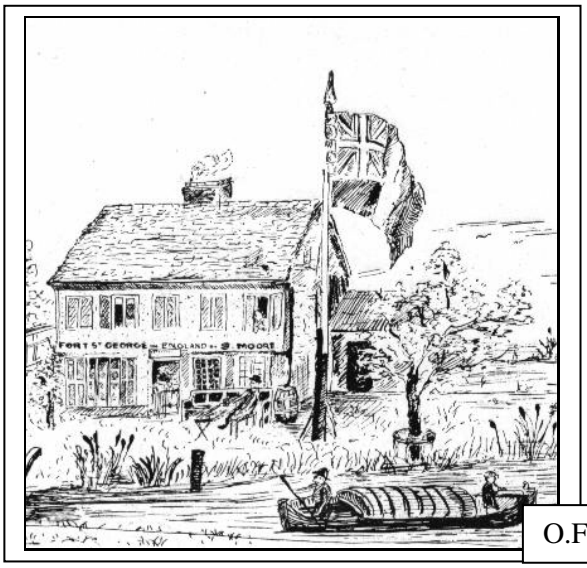
As Pickwick and his companion neared the "Fort St George" public house on Midsummer Common their attention was drawn to a rough-and-tumble between two scruffy urchins who were taking great delight in feigning a vicious attack on one another. Their antics caused both men to pause until the lads, noticing their audience, broke off the affray and ran off across the Common.

"Quite reminds me of what happened at the County Gaol on the day they hanged William Westnott and Charles Carter back in 1833. They'd been poaching in Kingston wood and got caught by Kidd, the gamekeeper. Instead of doing the usual thing and running for it, they shot at him, and so they were hanged.

"There was a good turn out of spectators, as usual, but many more women than normal, including Carter's sister. After her brother had kissed the Chaplain's hand, just before he took the drop, you could hear him say "God bless you". But when he hung all you could hear was the shrieks of his sister. Mind you Carter died almost instantaneously, though Westnott – a man of great muscular power – struggled violently for several minutes.



"And that was good for business for the pickpockets – you have to admire their cheek, stealing from people watching other people hanging for their crimes. Then as people streamed away back to their homes and their work there was another attraction -

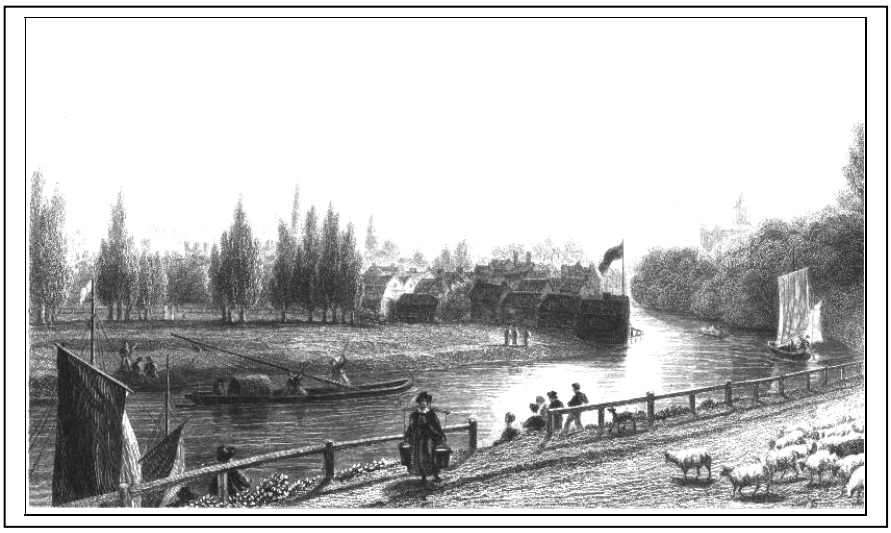
O.For

these lads battling it out amongst themselves in the castle grounds!"

They were now alongside the Fort St George, and Henry Pamment looked around him. "Where's the lock". Why did you need a lock – the inn door was open. But Pamment would not contemplate entering such a place

"There used to be a chap here, was landlord – thought he knew everything, ended up bankrupt…" "John Brown", chipped in Pickwick. "Yes that's the boy – how do you know him?" But that was a story Pickwick did not want to get into.

"Anyway last time I was here this pub stood on an island. There was a channel & a lock gate here, right in front of the pub, where the Conservator's man used to take the tolls from the barges – but it's been filled in. I wonder if they've still got the footbridge across the river".



But with all the river trade now plying along the Cam behind the pub the rickety old bridge had gone. The lock had been replaced by another, nearer the town, as part of a programme of improvement of river navigation and it was to this that the wanderers now directed their footsteps

As they neared the new sluice on Jesus Green the peace of the afternoon was disturbed by the sound of a splash. Sprinting into action Pamment left Pickwick puffing in his wake as he made off towards the plaintiff cries of a young lad, struggling in the murky waters of the Cam. Pickwick followed to find his companion now soaked to the skin, cradling in his arms the shivering, frightened, form of a ten-year-old lad. The boy's tears were part reaction to his immersion, and part concern at the fear of returning to his home in Park street without the bucket with which he had been sent to fetch water from the river.

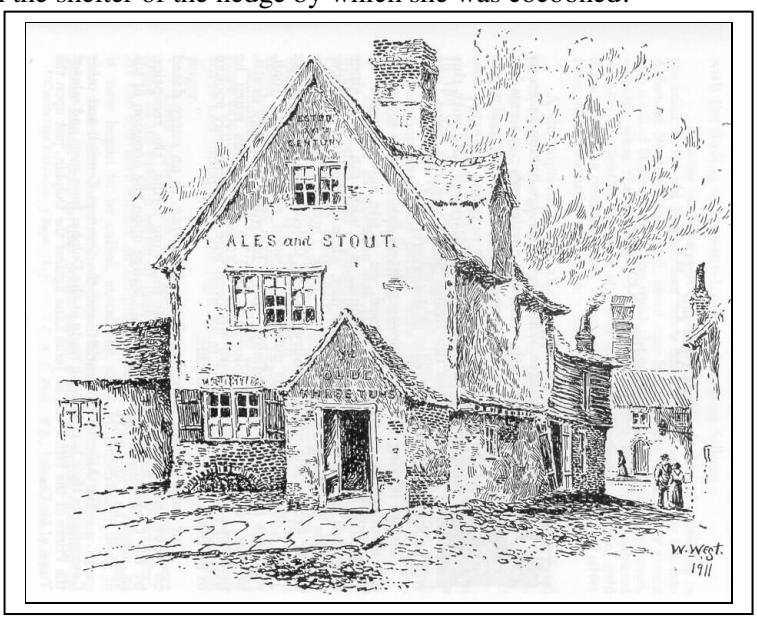
Pamment was all for escorting the lad home and explaining the situation but the boy would have none of it – he'd fallen in before, and would surely fall in again. His father would treat him leniently – he'd not be whipped like other lads for such a misdemeanour. But Henry Pamment persisted, until the lad let slip his name, James Stokes

That surname was too well known to the former Linton parish constable – was not Sergeant Stokes Deputy Recorder to the Borough of Cambridge, did he not preside over the Quarter Sessions – no Henry Pamment felt no inclination to risk making the acquaintance of such an eminent figure. What he had to do was to find somewhere to dry off his river-soaked clothes.

[scan O.For.J B.Ches.J42 2189]

Though it was a Summer's afternoon Henry Pamment was shivering before they reached the rear door of an inn in Castle Street. His urgent knocking summoned forth its landlord, John Whyman, who saw at a glance that the sodden, stained clothing could only have come from immersion in the open sewer that was the River Cam. He hastened them inside, set his servant to heat water and whilst that operation was in process turned to another form of liquid warmth from a bottle at the bar.

This, Pickwick learned, was officially called The Three Tuns, but known to most as Whyman's Inn, his family having been connected with it for many years. Passing over a glass of liquor the landlord commented: "This is the famous brandy that saved the life of Elizabeth Woodcock back in 1799, her who got lost in the snow and buried for eight days. Had it not been for the flask of this liquor that she took with her on that journey, she would have never survived" – and Whyman was all ready to launch into the tale, until Pickwick indicated that it was one he was already familiar with, and gently enquired whether, had Elizabeth not indulged quite so much brandy, she might never have become detached from her horse in the first instance, or slept quite so readily in the shelter of the hedge by which she was cocooned!



Not perturbed at all, Whyman now commenced another historical connection. "It was the Three Tuns that Samuel Pepys mentions in his diary – where he 'drank pretty hard and many healths to the King' in 1660. I've got here a token issued by the landlord at that time – they issued them when there was a shortage of small change". Here he handed over a small coin-like disk inscribed with the words 'William Wells 3 Tuns'.

"This Wells was an important man, why when his wife died in 1664 she was buried in the chancel of Gt St Mary's church. It was a great funeral, but little solemnity, she was borne to her resting place by a Master of Arts. But such an important man as the landlord of the Three Tuns could not be expected to live a solitary life and wells soon married again – this time in King's college chapel.

"And then again back in those days it was even part of a play, Nevile's Poor Scholar. There's a bit where he says 'let us go to the Three Tuns, and drink a pint of wine and laugh away our cares' – and then he sings
'Wee'l carouse in Bacchus' fountains, hang your beer and muddy ale'
Tis only Sack infuses courage, when our spirits droop and fail
Tis drinking at the Tuns that keeps us from ascending Buttery Barrels;
Tis this that safely brings us off, when we're engaged in feuds or quarrels'.

"On another occasion in 1750 a group of 46 members of the University who'd attended Westminster School were celebrating their school foundress when the Senior Proctor caught them drinking after 11 o'clock at night. But by then they was too far gone to take any notice of him, and some of those partying were very senior members of the University including the Regius Professor of Greek. So the Proctor got the Vice Chancellor to summon a special court to look into the matter, which was held in the Law Schools. Well the first day there was so much disturbance they had to draft in thirteen temporary proctors and fence off part of the court. It went on for four days and ended up reprimanding the Professor and three Fellows

and suspending the degree of another. But that wasn't the end of it – an appeal party met at the Tuns and they put out a pamphlet about it."

Now well into his stride, John Whyman started on another tale as how when engaged in beating the bounds in 1734 the Fellows of Trinity Hall started and finished at the Tuns and how the minister of St Edward's church supplied them with bread, cheese and ale and seven and a half quarts of ale in a great stone bottle for the people who assembled to watch.

But this was all too far fetched for Pickwick, now emboldened by his brandy. Why would the dons of Trinity Hall, in the centre of town, clamber all the way up to Castle Hill to beat their bounds, and how would a landlord from so distant an inn come to be married in King's college chapel? Whyman came clean – "I said that all this happened in the Three Tuns, and so it did – only there's another Three Tuns, on Market Hill – I'm only stretching the tale a little. And anyway, we do have a connection with somebody more famous than any member of the University – Dick Turpin himself!"

[scan O.Thr.K11 54.4]
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"It was here, at this Three Tuns, Castle Hill, that the notorious highwayman Dick Turpin used to stay when in Cambridge. I have it for a fact that on 12th January 1739 he left his velvet coat here – and he never came back to collect it. Well they hanged him at York a short time after"

Pickwick, having already exposed some of the landlord's stories as fabrications, was less than convinced this time, until Whyman disappeared into a back room and returned carrying a heavy velvet coat. There could be no doubt that this was genuinely old, and it took but little persuasion for Pickwick to be allowed to drape it around his more than rotund person.

Then his host produced another surprise: a wooden box containing a mask, pistol and spurs, of the same vintage. "And what's more he left his boots behind too – you can see them in one of the buildings that stand on the Market Hill"

Pickwick plunged his arms deep into the cavernous pockets of the great coat, where more than a century of dust and general debris had collected – but there was something more. Surely he could not be mistaken – something round and hard, not in the pocket but below it, down in the lining of the coat itself.

A less scrupulous man might not have commented on his discovery, might indeed have contrived to retrieve the item, to have taken it away. A braver man may have attempted it, but this was not Pickwick's way. Burbling with excitement he extricated himself from the coat's embrace and carefully laid the garment on the non-too-clean inn floor. Then to his host's amazement he set about exploring the inner folds of the garment.

There was no doubt something there. A few snips with a pair of somewhat rusty scissors exposed a false hem. And there was a half-crown, bearing the likeness of His Majesty George I. John Whyman was delighted – such a valuable find would certainly add to the attractions of his inn. But if there were one secret contained in the highwayman's coat, might there not be more?

Now all three men started a most careful search of the innermost recesses of the dusty fabric. It was Henry Pamment who discovered the gold ring, Whyman who found a pair of silver gilt earrings, and Pickwick himself who revealed not one, but two silver rings.

There could de no doubt – it was proof positive. Here in this ancient inn Dick Turpin himself had lodged, this was surely his coat, and the booty now unearthed for the first time in nearly a century the proceeds of some of his highway robberies.

Whilst this left Pickwick quivering with excitement at the discovery he could report to the next meeting of his Pickwick Club at London's George and Vulture inn, & Whyman trembling with anticipation as to how he could incorporate this latest development in his Cambridge history, neither noticed how Pamment was also shivering – but not with pleasure. For his immersion in the Cam had left him drenched, the mouthfuls of river water he had involuntarily swallowed had unsettled his stomach and the whole combined to cause him to shake uncontrollably.

By now a tub of hot water had been prepared and the drenched man took himself off to replaced his cold wetness with warm wetness, before snuggling down in the slightly stained sheets of a less-than-spotless bed in a room that offered little in the way of comfort, save the view across the street to that even less welcoming accommodation of the county gaol.

Pickwick left in the companionship of a now grateful landlord was treated to his version of the history of the ancient site opposite the inn

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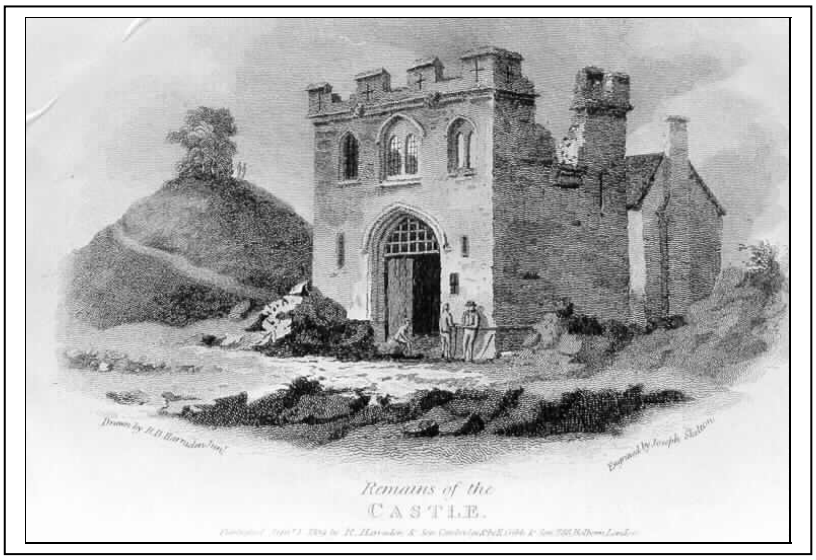
Across Castle street from the Three Tuns stood the remains of an ancient castle gatehouse, erected, claimed Whyman, by King Edward I way back in the 1280's. It had been built to strengthen the earlier fortifications of William the Conqueror, erected when he was attempting to suppress Hereward the Wake and his rebels on the Island of Ely 200 years before that.

"Of course", explained Whyman, "there used to be walls all around the castle, but they got pulled down over the years and the stone reused in the building of various colleges and churches. Well it had got to be cheaper just to lug it downhill than arrange for more stone to be brought in by river from the quarries at Reach, Harlton or further afield.

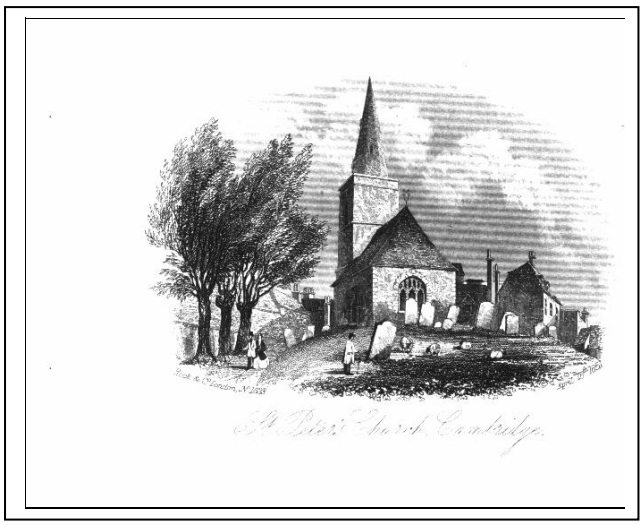
"As far as I can work out there used to be one wall run along the west side of Castle Hill, where our pub is built. Some of the houses have got cellars and in the basement of the White Swan there's a square of planks in the middle of the brick floor. We think that used to be a well for the castle.



"Then by they time we got the Civil War, with the University supporting King Charles and the town going for Oliver Cromwell there wasn't really much castle left. So Cromwell put in a lot more works – those banks and ditches you can see over there. At one time he had an army of about 23,000 men gathered here, which did our Three Tuns pub no end of good I should reckon. And it would have been better still if he'd paid his troops. They do say how the soldiers were nearly starving, with only tatty coats & shoes. And the local residents weren't too inclined to help them, since they in turn never got paid for the goods they supplied. I should not have wanted to be around in those days. Then when the war was nearly over in 1646 the defences were demolished and the soldiers and their horses sent to Ireland

“The castle carried on being used for the assizes. In one case, 1665, one robber was pressed to death – he was about an hour dying – because he refused to plead guilty or not guilty when charged. Another chap was put in the pillory and two more were hanged. The gallows used to be down there in the moat in front of the castle – but that got filled in in 1802 when they lowered the whole area to build the new gaol – one of those designed by John Howard the prison reformer. They found lots of old bodies just beneath the soil, along with tobacco pipes, bullets and other bits from Cromwell’s times

“Now we’ve just got the gatehouse left of the old building, and that’s in a ruinous condition. Its been bad for some time, and it never was very good for keeping prisoners in. We all remember how Patrick MacDonald was locked up there for smuggling tea in August 1776. He broke out through the roof and let himself down by a rope. Cheeky cove he was, left a note thanking the gaoler for all his favours and saying how he’d probably be back in a week or so.



“There’s all sort of discussion about what to do with the old gatehouse. Well you see the Cambridge churchyards are packed full, yet more and more people are coming into the town, and more and more are dying. We need a new public cemetery.

“Some people are wanting it put to the East of Parker’s Piece, where there’s some waste land, but others think it would be better up here on Castle Hill and we could convert the old gatehouse to become a gothic chapel. They think that if they plant the grounds up judiciously and buy an extra bit of land from the adjoining fields it would work out well. There would be the costs involved, but they think that if families buy up plots of land for family burying grounds they can make ends meet. It would make good trade for us publicans, for business can be slack – except when we get a good trial and a good hanging – that brings them in. People condemn Stallan – but he did us some good. You’ve heard about him, I’ve no doubt?”

[scan I.F.J09 M.Pet.J5]

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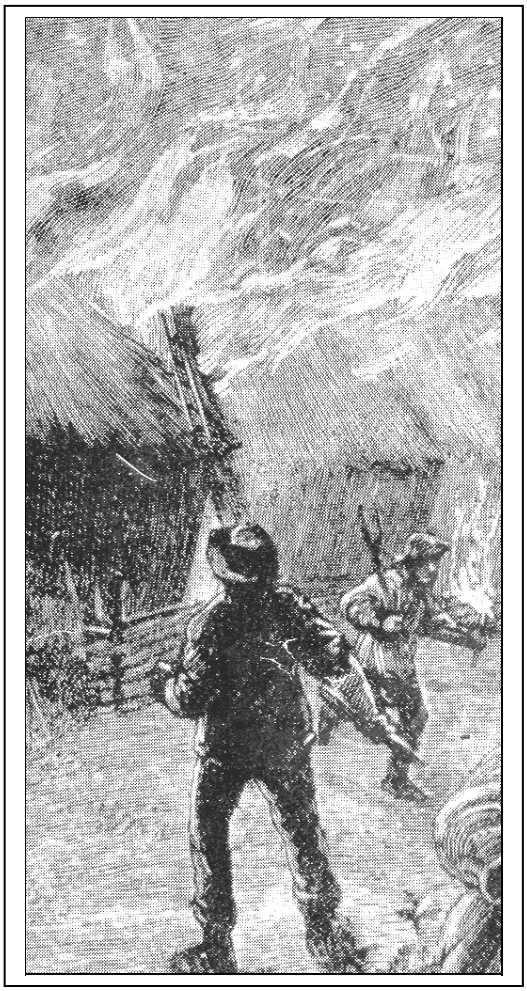
John Whyman led Pickwick to a log at the side of the road that served as a seat from which they had a good outlook over the county gaol on the top of Castle Hill, and here he commenced the tale of John Stallan

“It started back in November 1828 when a fire broke out in a straw stack at William Headley’s farm in Gt Shelford. The flames spread and soon the whole farmyard was ablaze. The fire engines were there quick enought, but there was little they could do except watch it burn. It was obviously wilfully set on fire, so they issued a reward but nothing was heard.



Then one Monday night in May 1829 a haulm stack in Mr Stacey's farmyard was set alight. It was a dark night and the flames could be seen for miles around – right as far as St Neots and March. It was so bright we all thought it must be on the outskirts of Cambridge and we all set off for the Trumpington road to get a look. Several people piled on to the Royal Exchange fire engine – so many that one of its wheels gave way and a chap named Holmes had his leg fractured. At the scene of the blaze the Shelford fire engine was soon out and the engines belonging to the Hertford, Norwich, Royal Exchange, Phoenix and Sun insurance companies were also in attendance and between them they contained the spread of the fire.

Things quietened down till December 1831 when Mr Headley's farmyard was on fire again. The farm there is near the river so there was plenty of water, and village folks turned out to fight it, but there was still over £3,000 damage caused. By now people were getting suspicious and they made representations to the King. He promised a reward of £400 to anybody who could give information and a royal pardon to any accomplice who gave evidence against the perpetrator. And what's more another £400 reward was also posted.

It soon had effect. The next week a labourer, Joseph Ellerm was arrested by a Bow Street runner and charged with arson. They also picked up John Ostler for the same offence, but let him go almost straight away. Then when Ellerm came to trial in March 1832 he was acquitted.

Once more all was quiet for a while but then in February 1833 farmer Wilkinson's farm was set alight, along with Henry Headley's haulm stack. They issued another reward, £300 this time. But next week Headley's cartshed was set on fire, and a few weeks later another of his pea stacks, and then a barn belonging to Joseph Payne. Then Mr Kirby had his barn burnt down and Mr Grain's sheep-yard on the green. The Shelford fire engine kept turning out – and they were getting quite good at fire fighting by now!

It was in June 1833 – five years ago – that William Dean noticed flames. He's a poulterer and saw smoke coming from the end of an out-building where he put his cart and cows of a night. Well as he told me: "The smoke was coming from straw near the bottom of the roof nearest the road. Me and my son went to the place and directly began to pull the straw out, which was all of a smoke, and there was some fire and sparks. I called for some water and my wife and son brought three or four pails full and I threw some of them on the straw and some on the roof, which put the fire out.

"Next day I found two matches amongst the straw we'd pulled off the roof – and there was also a ball of blue linen which was burnt through, it was composed of pieces of rag. I gave it to Mr William Headley and he gave it to Peter Grain."

Now somebody gave Grain a tip-off and he went to Mrs Cambridge's house and searched her work basket. He found pieces of linen there, just like what was set on fire. And she told him she'd made a gown from that material which she'd given to John Stallan's wife. So then Grain and Samuel Holder the constable went to Mrs Stallan and she confessed she had made up a bundle of rags using that dress, had put it in the thatch of Dean's barn and set it alight. There was only one snag – she was only a little lady about four feet high, and she could never have reached up high enough to the barn roof!
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"So if Elizabeth Stallan had not committed the acts of incendiarism at Shelford, who could have?" teased Whyman. "Why who else but her husband John. And why did he set fire to so many farms and stacks – why because he was one of those who turned out with the fire engine and got six shillings and six pence every time there was a blaze"

"He was duly found guilty and sentenced to hang in August, but the sentence was postponed, and people wondered if it would every get carried out. He survived until nearly Christmas 1833, though by then he was getting fed up with waiting. There was a good crowd turned out to watch his final moments. He attended the usual service at the prison chapel at 9 o'clock on the day he was to hang but was too nervous to shake hands with the other inmates, like most of the condemned men do. He did say a few words urging them to quit their evil ways and seek the Lord – the usual thing.

"Then just before noon he took his last walk to the scaffold and – as they say – was launched into eternity. There was a strong wind blowing at the time and it swung the body round a bit – made some think he was struggling, but he never did. Then a bit later they took the body back to Shelford in a cart.

"It was William Calcraft did the job – him that was appointed executioner to the City of London and County of Middlesex in 1829. He gets paid a weekly salary of £1.0.5d a week but he tops that up with other executions round the country and they say he picks up a fee of £10 a go.

"There was one time he'd been over to Ely about 1831 when he stopped the King's Lynn "Rover" stagecoach at the Red Lion Stretham and got on as a paying passenger. He always went to great pains to prevent himself being recognised and had gone in the procession to the scaffold on Ely common dressed as one of the Sheriff's javelin-men. But Jack Goodwin, who was guard on the coach recognised him straight away

"He told me that when Calcraft mounted the coach he was dressed like a Cambridgeshire farmer and thought nobody knew him. Goodwin took charge of his baggage, comprising a blue bag, half a dozen red cabbages and a piece of rope – the identical rope he's used to put an end to the unhappy wretch the day before. He then offered him a cigar and addressed Calcraft by name.

"The hangman told him he was mistaken. 'Oh no', said Jack, 'I am not; I saw you perform on three criminals at the Old Bailey a few weeks ago'

"That was conclusive and they chatted more or less pleasantly, although to be sure the conversation turned on Mr Calcraft's professional experiences. Just before he got off the coach he told Goodwin that 'if ever he had the pleasure of doing the job for him, he would soap the rope to make it as comfortable as possible!'

"Better to go that way than what happened to poor old Goodbody from Ely's driver, who got himself lost when between Stretham and Ely and was found frozen to death on Thetford common, away from the beaten track in February 1830. Then there was the accident in Stretham when a young lad, William somebody or other, was given the job of taking a horse from one side of the village of the other and was galloping at about 15 miles an hour. Several people yelled at him to slow down but he took no notice. There was a crowd in the street watching a dog fight and this lad galloped through the middle of

them. Ann, wife of John Phillips, stooped to rescue a child from his path and was struck by the horse. The lad stopped further down the street when his hat blew off. He claimed the horse had bolted – but there were plenty of witnesses who said he could have stopped if he'd wanted – they found him guilty of manslaughter.

"Quite reminds me of old Lee Sugg – you remember him?"
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Pickwick racked his brain for the name of Lee Sugg. It was there, lurking somewhere at the back of his brain as Whyman commenced his tale.

"Now Lee Sugg was on his way to a performance in Ely, travelling in his own coach, when he met a old man by the wayside who waved him down just outside Milton and begged a lift. Well they got on well together, chatting merrily about this and that – how William Cole, the antiquarian who used to live at Milton, had once been curate at Waterbeach and not liked it. Apparently he'd' stayed at the old vicarage house back in February 1768 when that had been so windy and wet that the rain beat in at the hall windows so much as to make it all afloat. He moved into the parlour, but that was so damp and smoky that he was driven out of there and upstairs. Then finally 'not being a water rat' he'd moved to the higher ground at Milton!

"They took the track through Landbeach with its old plague house where two old ladies fleeing from London during the great plague had settled in the house and brought the pestilence with them – which they then managed to pass on to the rector and his family. And then there's the church where back in 1756, so the story goes, some workmen were refitting a seat and found themselves obstructed by a piece of masonry jutting out from one of the pillars. It was a stone in the shape of a rose, about four feet up. They gave it a tap with their hammer and it came away. Behind it was a cavity and inside it two wooden dishes, wrapped together. They opened them up and inside they found a human heart – 200 years old they reckoned!

"Of course once you get beyond Landbeach you get into what used to be untracked territory. Its less than 80 years ago that there was no road through that way, least none you could get along on a carriage. The main way from Cambridge to Ely was out to Rampton and Willingham and then by the Aldreth causeway and up through Haddenham. It was some Ely bishop – Mawson I think his name way, who started to make the road up in the 1750s and now its been turnpiked and widened.

"By now they were well on their way, till they got to Stretham. As the carriage made its way through the main street there were some children playing about the street . When they stopped at the Red Lion for refreshment these kids climbed on the coach, generally larking about and that annoyed Lee Sugg who got his coachman to sort them out.

"But as soon as they set off again these brats clambered round, hanging on behind and the like. Then as they got past the windmill and picked up speed there was a cry from underneath the coach – a child's voice begging 'Stop the coach … stop the coach'. 'Carry on driver' called out Sugg, now most annoyed, 'that'll teach them to climb up on my conveyance'. Of course this really upset his travelling companion who urged him to stop, but Sugg would have none of it.

"Eventually the chap could stand it no longer – he leaned out of the coach and roared at the driver to pull over, and that he finally did, just near the Quarterway. Down jumped the passenger and dived underneath the vehicle – but there was nobody there. Fearing the child must have fallen off he looked back up the hill towards the village – but saw nothing. Then he heard the cry again 'Stop the coach' coming from underneath. Back under he went, still no body…"

It was at this point that Pickwick remembered where he had heard the name. Not in some court of law being tried for cruelty but in another place of entertainment – the theatre. For Lee Sugg was famous, as

a ventriloquist! His ability to throw his voice was legendary, no wonder he'd been able to fool his unsuspecting companion.

But now there was someone almost his equal, opined Whyman, and Mr Newman would be performing in the Large Room at the Sun Hotel in a few weeks time – just part of the wide range of entertainment there were to be found in Cambridge especially out of term time.

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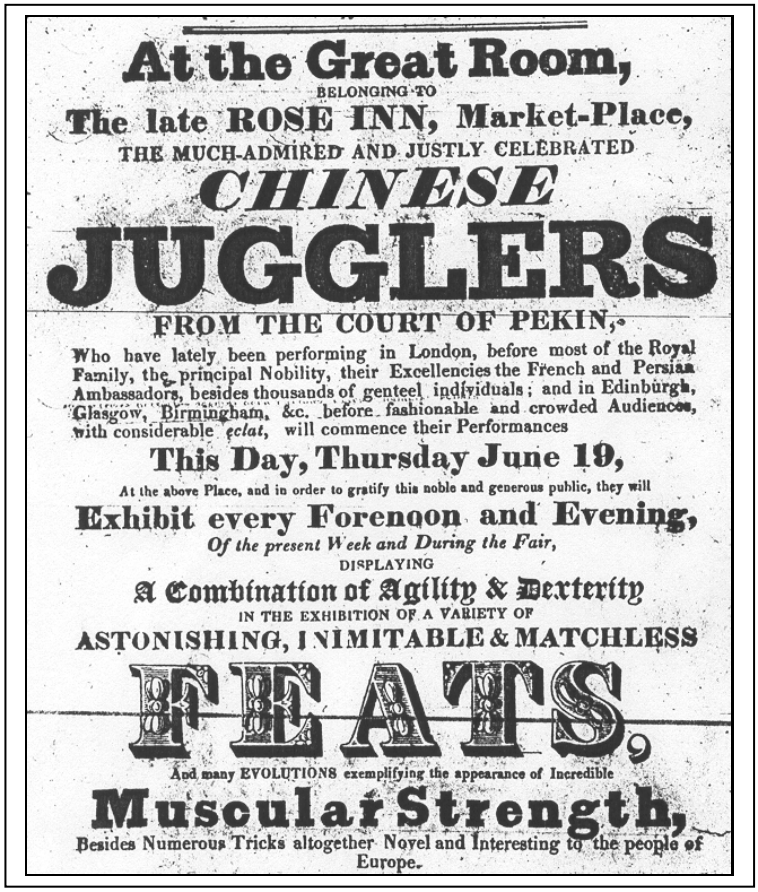
Pickwick had had his fill of tales of murder and hangings, could he now turn the conversation on to other, more congenial subjects. His companion, landlord of the Three Tuns, John Whyman, had raised the topic of ventriloquism – perhaps this was the chance he needed.

Whyman was quick to respond and soon recounting details of some of the fantastic wonders that had entertained Cambridge folk in recent years. There were the Chinese jugglers with their 'astonishing, inimitable and matchless feats of incredible muscular strength' who had bewitched audiences at the Rose Inn, Market Hill back in 1821.


At the Great Room,
BELONGING TO
The late ROSE INN, Market-Place,
THE MUCH-ADMIRED AND JUSTLY CELEBRATED
CHINESE
JUGGLERS
FROM THE COURT OF PEKIN,
Who have lately been performing in London, before most of the Royal Family, the principal Nobility, their Excellencies the French and Persian Ambassadors, besides thousands of genteel individuals; and in Edinburgh, Glasgow, Birmingham, &c. before fashionable and crowded Audiences, with considerable *eclat*, will commence their Performances
This Day, Thursday June 19,
At the above Place, and in order to gratify this noble and generous public, they will
Exhibit every Forenoon and Evening,
Of the present Week and During the Fair,
DISPLAYING
A Combination of Agility & Dexterity
IN THE EXHIBITION OF A VARIETY OF
ASTONISHING, INIMITABLE & MATCHLESS
FEATS,
And many EVOLUTIONS exemplifying the appearance of Incredible
Muscular Strength,
Besides Numerous Tricks altogether Novel and Interesting to the people of Europe.

"What they did with their golden balls, china basins and small sticks has puzzled me ever since and I'm sure if old Stallan had just learned one of their tricks he'd still be setting fire to stacks in Sawston to this day. This Chinese chap got a bundle of bits of paper, which he set alight – and then ate it. There was smoke and flames coming out of his mouth and nose and he seemed as if his whole innards were ablaze. Then he put his fingers into his mouth and drew out white ribbons – yard after yard of them, and then more yards of red ribbon.

"Another one swallowed 50 sewing needles, one after the other. He kept them there in his throat some time and then, when he pulled them out, they were all threaded together! I have never seen anything like that.

Mind you old Mr Wheatley with his black magic hats and secret goblets also has things that would amaze you – well it amazed me any rate. I went to see him at the Wrestlers' Inn in Petty Cury". At this Pickwick shuddered, recalling how he too had been subjected to some form of black magic there, losing much of his worldly income at the hands of swindlers. Whyman's experience had been somewhat different.

"He asked several of us up out of the audience, and I course had to have a go. He took out a pack of cards and we all selected one – mine was the three of hearts – and put it back. Then I

shuffled the pack. Wheatley put the cards into a glass bottle and then he went and stood some way off. ‘What was your card?’ he asked me, and I told him – and blast me if that red three did not jump out of the pack all on its own! He could make those cards walk, dance, fly or be visible or invisible at a word.

“Then he took two eggs, just normal eggs they were. But out of one of them he extracted a live animal the size of a duck – and the other one danced the hornpipe! That all made Madame Kean’s performing dogs look tame – though one of them played cards. As for the lady herself – they billed her as the eighth wonder of the world, the way she could tell what anybody was thinking, or what words they’d written down – well if she’d known what words we were thinking of she’d not have been very happy. They’d made out how she was one of the most beautiful women in Europe, what with her long hair right down her back – but it was when she had her back to the audience and told the times set on twenty different watches was the best part of the show.

“Now for real mystery you’d go a long way to better the Gyngells – there’s a family of them and two pretty daughters accompany the performance on the pedal harp and piano forte. They really are magicians and he’d got all sorts of mechanisms to help him. The one I saw at the Black Bear inn, Market Street was what he called the ‘Eidomultiphoscopia’ – or something like that – the dance of witches. He conjured up this luminous form, floating in the air – somebody said it was old Weems come back again – but then as you looked it broke up into thousands of optical figures forming into dancing columns”

Pickwick had seen the self-same show at the Royal Gardens, Vauxhall and could well understand its appeal to the unsophisticated Cambridge audience – had Whyman visited Vauxhall. “Why should I visit London, when everybody who’s anybody comes to Cambridge.

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Now Pickwick knew that Cambridge was a famous place, and that it attracted visitors – indeed was not his own presence proof of that – but to claim, as was Whyman, that it brought folk from across the globe was surely too far fetched.

But Whyman was adamant. “I’ve seen the Don Cossack and a Russian barbarian, the Russian Queen and the Emperor Alexander. Monks and nuns, Portuguese, Swiss, Icelandic and Madeiran. I’ve seen Chinamen and London flower girls, the Duke of Wellington and even Napoleon Bonaparte – and what’s more they was all in Cambridge at the same time and in the same place – the Black Bear Inn.”

And then seeing Pickwick’s disbelief, John Whyman winked. “Of course I’ve not seen them in the flesh exactly, but I have seen them exactly as in the flesh – only made of paper”

It was, it transpired, Mrs Aberdein’s famous Papyruseum, an assemblage of models of paper characters, lauded by the Cambridge Chronicle (who ought to know a thing or two) as an ‘interesting and extraordinary combination of taste and genius’. The display had attracted large crowds of the respectable and fashionable – and nearly 1,000 gentlemen of the university. Not only were the figures perfect, but their very clothes were designed and executed entirely in paper.

It was something, opined Whyman, “that would live in the memory for ages”, were it not that as soon as this exhibition had departed just before the Christmas of 1821, then another one had arrived, determined to drive it out of the public remembrance.

“Now one week we had Wellington and Napoleon in the flesh, as it were, but the next we could see for ourselves the great conflicts that changed the course of history. For the Theatre in Barnwell was transformed into a grand historical peristrephic of the battles of Ligny, Les Quarte Bras and Waterloo itself.”

This grand panorama had been painted on nearly 10,000 square feet of canvas under the direction of none other than Lord Fitzroy Somerset, the military secretary and aide-de-camp to the Duke of Wellington. It depicted all the British and Allied officers – Marshall Blucher, the Duke of Brunswick, the Prince of Orange and the others on the one side, together with the French generals on the others. A detailed series of paintings depicted the various stages of the campaign, the whole being made the more vivid by an appropriate rendition of appropriate military airs – ‘Cambells are coming’, ‘British Grenadiers’ and ‘Highland Laddie’ by a full military band. For two weeks it played to packed houses, then it was packed up and gone to the next venue.

“So you see”, argued Whyman, “we did very nearly see Napoleon in the flesh – and we’d been prepared for him if he had come himself. The landlord could recall very well how, in 1803 the enemy had massed in thousands on the coast of France & invasion was imminent. A landing on the East coast would probably be followed by a sweep into London and it would be every village for itself.

The country was struck with terror. Plans were drawn up to cope if the worst came to the worst. Men of fighting age were given the option of being conscripted into the army or volunteering for the Volunteers – so everybody volunteered. These local volunteers would turn out to fight in groups of some 50 men armed with pickaxes, spades and billhooks if necessary. John Cheetham Mortlock called a meeting in the Cambridge Town Hall when they agreed to form a corps of cavalry and another of infantry – though being Cambridge they soon dropped the cavalry idea. But the town and the University combined for once, both ready to help defeat the menaces of the French. But that didn’t last very long – the University soon decided to have a Volunteer corps of their own – and a right fighting force they were!

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Faced with a common foe – Napoleon Bonaparte - town and gown had combined in 1803, but not for long.

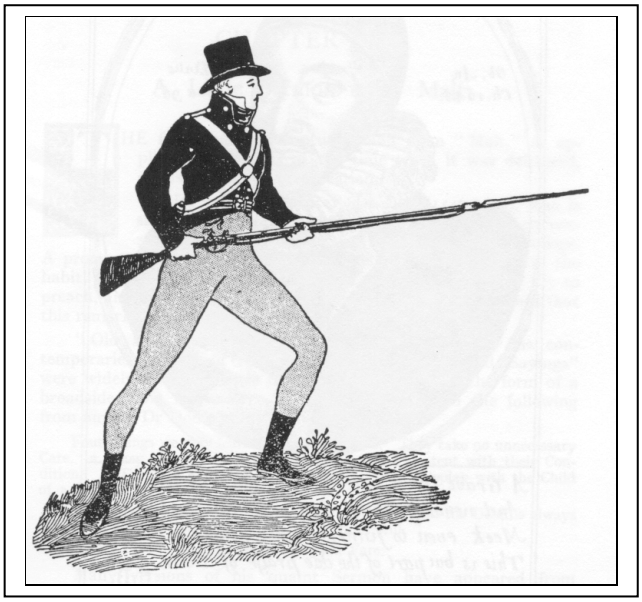
University authorities were keen for their men to play a part, granting one hour every day for drilling and allowing their Volunteers to be absent from their lectures. But it was not right that University gentlemen should be expected to take orders from townsmen, nor indeed even from their colleagues. They would be leaders of men, so each took it in turn to be an officer. But by the time an undergraduate had learned how to command, it was time for him to return to his own part of the country where he would be well equipped to lead their local Volunteer force.

Nevertheless some sort of officers had to be appointed, one of whom was Edward Daniel Clarke of Jesus college. The name rang a bell with Pickwick – was this not the chap who had launched a balloon that had carried a kitten off into the atmosphere, soaring over the college battlements? Indeed it was, but now he had turned soldier leaving behind an account of his experiences in a letter written in November 1803, which somehow contrives to be amongst Pickwick’s papers.

“I am just come from practising the light infantry manoeuvres, over all the hedges and ditches, towards Madingley, wet, muddy, and oozing at every pore. At present nothing is talked of in Cambridge but the drill – who shoulders best; who trod down Beverley’s heels in close marching.” They were certainly fierce – at least compared to their town colleagues against whom they organised mock battles on Parker’s Piece.

Their fighting spread further afield with exercises at Bury St Edmunds and Saffron Walden where in the words of one amateur poet: “We shew'd our martial skill; And if no French we slaughter'd, No French we meant to kill.”

But it was the people at Newmarket who had most to fear, for after exercises on the Heath when they'd stormed the Devils Dyke: “And then street-firing through the town, Put young and old in fears - They took for murd'ring Frenchmen, The Cambridge Volunteers”



The young University men in their Grenadier’s uniform with smart infantry jackets parading to their martial music added to their attraction as far as members of the opposite sex were concerned. But not all the students could actually afford the uniforms, and when the University offered some payment towards their expenses it was a Nobleman’s son who first put down his name for a musket.

Such gentlemen soldiers could not fight with just any old weapon and rifles were ordered from a superior gunsmith, Henry Knock of Birmingham. But it could not last, the interest in things military soon began to wane and the University Volunteers faded away after Christmas.

It was a situation echoed out in the country. Some villages, such as Sutton, were a disgrace to the cause. Ensign Gimbert and several privates had refused to accept orders and generally acted up to such an extent that there was no hope of maintaining discipline and the whole Company had to be disbanded.

On the other hand the situation at the neighbouring village of Haddenham could not be more different – and once more there was a rhyme to commemorate it

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“I had this little poem from Thomas Berry of Willingham”, claimed Whyman. “He composed ot on February 29th 1804 – though I think he had an eye to the main chance since he seems to praise all of them. Mind you it’s worth a read through”

And so the publican commenced to recite the ode in praise of the Haddenham Volunteers

A gallant youth does them command,
Captain Porter, call'd by name sir,

Who ready is to take the field,
If the French dare cross the main sir;
His property will him support,
The same he will defend sir;
Like a Briton brave, defies French slaves.
He's belov'd by all his men sir.
With sword in hand, complete he stands, a Haddenham volunteer sir.

Mr. Robert, Pate, Lieutenant brave
Will leave his farm and mill sir,
And like a sprightly hero bold,
His British blood to spill sir,
Determin'd is to take the field,
If ere the French do land sir;
His property for to protect,
And fight the sword in hand sir.
With sword in hand complete, he stands a Haddenham Volunteer sir.

Berry's verses went on to praise the other village heroes – Ensign John Clay, portly sergeant Taylor of the Bull accomplished on violin, fife and drum; spearman Benjamin Clay & butcher-turned-corporal, John Linton.

"At three o'clock in the afternoon,
I heard the warlike drum sir,
And where the maypole once did stand,
Those heroes soon did come sir;
And sergeant Taylor call.'d their names,
While their arms did shine so bright sir:
Then by beat of drum their Captain comes,
In whom they all delight sir.
Three score and ten all fine young men are the Haddenham Volunteers sir.

Their officers are quite complete,
So are the private men sir,
And of all troops that e'er I view'd,
There's few does them excel sir,
In firing volleys they are complete,
I stood upon the ground sir,
And whilst these lines I did compose,
They circled me around sir.
Success unto our soldiers all, and the Haddenham Volunteers sir.

When the Haddenham lads brigaded are,
With the Ely lads and Stretham,
And join'd to those the Sutton lads,
If Boney land's they'll meet him;
But he has got to cross the seas,
Before that he can land sir,
But our seaman they are valiant men,
So are the Volunteers by land sir.
May victory crown the arms of all those gallant Volunteers sir."

"Only the problem was" – added Whyman, "that as I've told you the Sutton company had to be disbanded because of insubordination – and surely you've heard what happened to the brave militia men of Ely and how they were whipped by the Germans who were on our side!"

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While the patriotic volunteers had paraded and prepared to repel Napoleon there was another foreign army closer to home, who played their part in a battle, at least in Whyman's account.

"In June 1809 the Ely militia assembled for drill and training for the customary period of 28 days. Every man who took part was well fed with beef and bread and in addition he received a guinea for his trouble. They were supplied with a uniform and the ordinary necessities of a military life – except for rucksacks and gaiters. These the men had to pay for themselves. But at Ely some of the chaps took offence at this – 'if you want us to be soldiers, you have to supply us with all the equipment – including rucksacks' they said. But the officers refused. 'Right' said the men, 'you don't supply the rucksacks, we shan't be soldiers'

This provoked a stand-off, men versus officers – and as there were more men than officers they had the upper hand and locked them up. This scared the generals – they called it a mutiny and one chap was sent galloping out of the city at full speed to get reinforcements.

Four squadrons of German cavalry were soon on the scene – they'd made the journey from Ipswich to Ely in just one day - which surprised the Ely men. They were preparing to fight the French, not the Germans. Twenty-six of the ringleaders were rounded up.

When it came to their trial everybody was keen to say just what a mix-up it had been. The men all said they'd been well treated and not half-starved at all. The Earl of Hardwicke, Colonel of the regiment, said what a good lot they all were, how it was just a misunderstanding put out by one or two agitators, and they hadn't really imprisoned their officers.

It didn't do much good, despite everything five of the ringleaders were sentenced to receive 500 lashes, (though in the end they forgot to carry all of it out).

But it all caused uproar – how could local patriotic volunteers, prepared to fight for our country, be flogged by Germans. The poor lads had been driven to mutiny out of desperation – they'd not been fed for weeks, been ill-treated, not been paid – the tales got better as the tales got spread.

Now William Cobbett – the champion of the labourer – he got to hear about it and he wrote it up in his 'Political Register' dressing it up a bit more. This incensed the Government of Spencer Perceval who'd introduced the Militia training bill, and they sued him for libel, flung him in gaol for two years and fined him £1,000. What's more they even imprisoned the printer, Mr Hansard – whose family now publish the official parliamentary reports. That'll teach them both to be more careful of what they put on paper!

Then in 1830 William Cobbett came to Ely on one of his Rural Rides. He didn't think much of the place – a miserable little town, he called it, what with some of the cathedral windows blocked up with brick and mortar to save the expense of reglazing them, and a flock of sheep grazing in the cathedral churchyard

He thought he'd get a warm welcome there, for telling the truth about the militia floggings, but nobody seemed keen to give him a bed. At the end he had to take a room at the Lamb! Then he set off to try and find out where it had all happened and he did manage to find one chap who would take him to the spot where the beatings took place. Cobbett then treated him

to one of his lectures – the poor chap was glad enough to get away. But now, having come so far, and got himself so riled up he was desperate to find a larger audience to address.
Compiled Eve

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Having criticised the flogging of Ely troops by German soldiers – and been imprisoned for his pains – William Cobbett went to the city to see for himself in 1830, determined to harangue its citizens. But he found nowhere suitable for his lecture.

It being a Thursday the market was in full swing, so he went into the White Hart on the Market Place, found an upstairs room, threw open the sash window and waited for the crowds to gather to hear his opinions. But nobody seemed to have time, or inclination to listen. He sought out the largest gathering of farmers, intending to join them for dinner – but they had better things to discuss than Cobbett's politics and turned him away from the table.

A good meal would be followed by a good smoke – so Cobbett retired to the room where they usually took a pint and a pipe. The room – so he recorded in his 'Rural Rides' "was too small to contain a twentieth part of the people that would have come in if they could. It was hot to suffocation; but, nevertheless I related to them the account of the flogging, and of my persecution on that account, and I related to them how a large sum of English money is now every year sent abroad to furnish half pay and allowances to the officers of those German troops. I told them – 'You have to work to pay that money; part of the taxes you pay on your malt, hops, beer, leather, soap, candles, tobacco, tea, sugar, and everything else, goes abroad every year to pay these people – and it will go abroad for the rest of your life'. I told them one million, seven hundred thousand pounds had been sent abroad on this account since the peace – at which they seemed to be utterly astonished"

Warming to his task in this already over-warm room, Cobbett "did that which I never fail to do, showed them the absurdity of grumbling at the six millions a year given in relief to the poor, while they were silent and seemed to think nothing of the sixty millions of taxes collected by the Government at London. I explained to them how the church rates and poor rates came to be introduced, how the nation had sunk by degrees ever since the reformation …"

On and on he ranted - about poverty, idleness, extravagance, the duty of government and the catholic church, and the audience got more and more heated as the room got hotter and hotter. "I advised the farmers to be well with their work-people; for that, unless their flocks were as safe in their fields as their bodies were in their beds, their lives must be lives of misery; that if their stacks and barns were not places of as safe deposit for their corn as their drawers were for their money, the life of the farmer was the most wretched upon earth, in place of being the most pleasant, as it ought to be".

His audience comprised a few farmers, but were principally a motley crowd of gardeners, tailors and shoemakers. Questions were put to the most learned one, and he replied with much wonderful condescension. The landlord of the White Hart looked in frequently – not so much to listen, but to make sure nobody slipped off without paying for their beer – though Cobbett only drank milk.

Eventually he tore himself away and retired to the Lamb, followed by a small retinue of followers, one of which was adamant that Cobbett had not paid his reckoning. It all descended into farce as a servant was sent to sort it all out and instead of spending time arguing his political views, he spent it squabbling over his bill. .

Next day he set off again, this time through open unfenced fields and common lands to St Ives where he harangued a meeting of about 200 persons in a wheelwright's shop, that being the only safe place in the town of sufficient dimensions and sufficiently strong. From there he repaired to Huntingdon, spent an evening lecturing at Chatteris before heading off across the fens to Stamford, Peterborough, & Wisbech by which time there was a hard frost, with ice an inch thick – well it was April after all, just another burden for the farmer to bear.

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Pickwick was becoming weary with sitting on the tree trunk on the top of Castle Hill where a breeze had started to kick up dust, and Whyman too seemed suddenly to fall silent. For a while each sat quietly, with nothing to say but neither really wanting to return to the Three Tuns inn for fear of what they would learn of the condition of young Henry Pamment who they had left tucked up in bed shivering violently after his dip into the river.

It was Pickwick who broke the silence, dredging his memory for any interesting tales he could think of with some sort of criminal content – how at Horsley House of Correction in Essex villains had taken a ladder from the church, placed it against the gaol wall and climbed in! Once inside they had drawn the ladder behind them and used it to climb up to the window of the governor's office. They had broken in and, knowing that he kept valuables in the drawer of his desk, turned their attention to that somewhat solid piece of furniture.

Imagine the Governor's surprise when he had next visited his office to discover the theft – not of the gold, but of the entire desk! Somehow the villains had got it out of the room, over the gaol wall and into the surrounding countryside, where it was found in an adjoining field – but needless to say without its contents.

Whyman was prompted to respond with a tale he had heard from a man employed by Mr Daniels, brewer of East Bergholt. He had been delivering beer in Bear Lane, Colchester, when one of the barrels on his cart had exploded. The vessel was blown into the air to a height of between 20 & 30 feet and fell on the roof of a house occupied by a Mr Hatfield, tailor. It then rebounded on to the roof of a shed belonging to Mr Nash, a fishmonger, before landing up in his yard. The report had alarmed the neighbourhood and within minutes a number of inhabitants were on the spot where they found the cart, horse and the deliveryman covered in yeast and scared out of their wits. The front of Mr Hatfield's house was also besmeared in the explosive liquid.

The scene created much merriment amongst the bystanders and the driver, having recovered his wits asked "Where ever is the barrel gone to?", which caused roars of laughter. On examination it was found that the fermented yeast had forced out the bottom of the vessel, and at the same instant elevated the cask into the air nearly in a perpendicular direction.

It was fortunate that the driver had not been sitting on the barrel at the time, as he usually did. Otherwise he must have made a rapid aerial ascent to a considerable height and his retouching terra firma would probably have been attended with rather serious consequences!

Was that a problem Whyman had encountered before, wondered Pickwick

"No, he replied, if fact we have the other problem – not too much kick in the beer but too little. William Edwards, a Cambridge brewer kept getting his beer sent back from the pubs, because the customers kept sending it back to the bar saying they couldn't drink it. He couldn't work out what was going wrong, until he went into his brew-house and found one of the barrels had been partly emptied of beer and filled up with water. So he set a man to keep watch. Then he went to one of his customers in King Street to see why she had not given him an order recently. Well the lady said she's had half a barrel only the other day, delivered by

his drayman in two nine gallon casks. Well that got Edward's suspicions raised, he checked up and found that no order had been received at the brewery, though an order had been delivered.

"It was obvious what was going on. His delivery lad had been drawing some beer off, filling the barrel with water, and then selling the beer on his own account". That wasn't the only problem landlords faced – as the now warmed up again Whyman confided.

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Life for a publican was far from straightforward, and had got worse in recent years, according to John Whyman, landlord of the Three Tuns on Castle Hill, Cambridge.

"The problem is that to sell beer in Cambridge you need a licence. Until a few years ago it was simple – you applied to the Vice Chancellor of the University and provided you kept an orderly house – and voted the right way at election time – you got a licence. But then after the Government reformed the corporations the Cambridge town council decided that they now had the power to licence alehouses – and that anyway the Vice Chancellor only had the rights over wine, not beer or spirits. So they called a meeting and about 200 of the publicans attended and got licensed.

But then the University said that they were the only people who could legally issue licences in Cambridge and that even if the council had granted you one, you had to apply to them. Well the argument dragged on for years – there've been court cases but I don't think anybody yet knows just what you have to do to be right.

Even if the town can grant the licences the University will still fine you if you serve ale in anything other than a mug that they've put their seal on, or if you allow games to be played on your premises. Some publicans pay the fine and think they can then allow gaming, or sell beer in earthen mugs – but they can't and get fined again.

Out in the villages there are more problems. There the public houses are in competition with the beer houses which open any hours, day or night. There are set down times for the sale of beer, this time of year – between June and September you can open from 5am to 10pm, the rest of the year from 7am to 9pm – apart from Sundays when its closing time at 8pm all year. And on Sunday's there's supposed to be no beer sold before 1 o'clock and during the afternoon. But these rules are being flouted. The parish constables should be enforcing them, but they're often related to people in the trade, and anyway they have to live in the village and on the wages they get it's just not worth making a fuss,

The number of beerhouses has shot up recently – and no surprise. Until a few years ago villages pubs were all run by big breweries and the beer they supplied was an execrable mixture, guiltless of malt and hops, sour as verjuice and smacking villainously of quassia and molasses. When the government changed the rules and people didn't have to apply to magistrates for licences many people started to set up their own beer shops. The small shopkeeper scraped together a few pounds, set up a copper, brought a few barrels and turned brewer, beer was cheaper and better because of the competition.

But the clergy objected over the dissolute habits of their flock; the farmer blamed it for causing idleness and insubordination amongst his workmen, the farmer's wife complained that every since the Chequers had opened it had been all the worse for her hen-house and dovecote. Gamekeepers claimed they could not keep a head of game on the whole manor. Magistrates blamed the increase of crime on the beerhouses & denounced them as nurseries of debauchery and every species of crime.

They've became the convenient place of rendezvous for the idle and dissipated, but as long as there's no gross breach of decency, even though whole of rate-payers wish to do away with them, neither they not squire, clergyman or overseer can do anything about it.

So the poacher, thief & incendiary continue to meet at the beer shop where they get a better pint for their money and get a fire and candle for nothing. Meanwhile their wives and children are suffering the pains of cold and hunger at home - and talking of cold, I wonder how young Pamment is doing?"

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By the time Pickwick and Whyman returned to the Three Tuns on Castle Hill they found Henry Pamment somewhat warmer, and somewhat drier after his dip into the polluted waters of the River Cam, but still not well enough to contemplate the long walk back to Linton. But neither could he stay longer at the inn for, with the approach of Stourbridge Fair, Cambridge was already becoming busy and beds were at a premium.

So how to get him home? There were two carriers who made the journey every Wednesday and Saturday afternoons. One, Whiffen, left from the Brazen George in St Andrew's street, whilst Smith set off from the Crown and Woolpack in Sidney Street. This being the nearer Whyman sent a lad running off with a note to its landlord, Charles Adams, calling in a favour.

Whilst they awaited his return Henry Pamment was enticed out of the bed, wrapped up warm in a mixture of discarded clothing – which would have included the old coat that had belonged to Dick Turpin, save that Whyman was still not convinced he had explored every seam and that there might not be more booty concealed. The also fortified both Pamment and themselves with warming liquor.

Within a quarter of an hour the messenger returned, with the cheering news that the carrier had still been at the inn, loading the various goods that village people had asked him to take back to the villages en route to Linton. He would, they were assured, be there shortly.

Minutes dragged by – but then carriers were a law unto themselves explained Wisken. It was a job that saw them out on the road each day, in all weathers, seeing plenty of the countryside and meeting plenty of characters. The Kingston carrier was a case in point – and was also a case, spending the long plodding hours deep in thought and deep in verse. From one of the hidden recesses of the inn he produced a scrap of paper recording in rustic verse the route and routine. The handwriting was of a childish nature and far from neat, having been jotted down by a young girl, Kath, jolting along on a journey from her home.

Monday his route took him to Arrington, over Eversden drove and down Wimpole and the Woodyard. Tuesday was his day for Barton and Cambridge – "And oi'm loaded pretty well, with folk, pook and sack". Wednesday saw him off to Orwell, Barrington, Harlton and Haslingfield with a cartload of washing. "On Thursday we dew Comberton, Gamlingay tew, But we doon't dew such business as we other day's dew". Friday made up for it – for Friday he was off to Royston "With shoppers and traders, and livestock a few. The market's roight boisterous, All shouting and bawl, In the inn they are roisterous, Like any market stall".

But Saturdays were different, as the carrier-poet recorded. "On Sat'days foolk hire me, Goo here, and goo there. Privit hiring is tiring, And foolks dew not care. Oi goo tew their Grannies, Or tek foolks tow wed, But On Sunday's oi'm resting, an Oi'm in me bed"

Just as everybody was thinking that the Linton carrier had also taken to his bed there came the slow steady plot of horse hooves toiling up the hill, a rough "Whoa boy" and a creaking judder as a heavy-laden cart sighed to a halt. It was followed by a bawled "Cum out if yer

comin, I in't got all day". The door opened to reveal the rough, weather-beaten and corpulent figure of Tom Smith. When he caught glimpse of his passenger, Henry Pamment, his expression of annoyance was transformed into one of hatred – "Yew ain't asking me to take him are yer, one of the most hated men in Linton. If that got out I'd helped the parish constable I'd never be able to get business from anyone else in the village!"

It took a great deal of persuasion, and not a little bribing before he would change his mind, and take Pamment at least some of the way. The sick man was roughly placed in the back of the wagon and – to keep the peace – Pickwick clambered on the seat beside the driver. With a bellow and a squeak the cart set off, made a sweep in the road and headed down the hill.

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As the ill-tempered carrier's cart careered crazily down Magdalene street, scattering pedestrians as it passed, Pickwick's thoughts were drawn back to that other traumatic journey – was it only days ago – when his stagecoach trip to Cambridge had ended in an accident and himself sprawled in the dust of Senate House Hill.

He recalled some of the events of subsequent days – his meeting with swindlers who'd fleeced him of his money, and of Henry Gunning whose cheque he had donated to the Female Refuge who were seeking to rescue girls like Fanny Hopkins from a life of prostitution and incarceration in that private University gaol, the Spinning House.

As they clattered across the bridge his eyes sought for a glimpse of bargee Will Spread, wondering whether he had escaped from the matrimonial clutches of laundress lady Alice Bond. Had the Peterhouse porter yet forgiven him for allowing the college deer to escape or Chumley the chimney-sweep found a smaller boy than Tom to send down privies?

Past Sidney Sussex college they plodded, the ancient pony having run out of puff now he no longer had the benefit of a steep slope behind him. Was that John Brown he glimpsed, self-importantly strolling towards his billiards shop, and doubtless informing the world of the opinions that he held so highly.

There was Market Street and Simeon's church, Holy Trinity, and here the cart veered right, towards the Market Hill, still busy with stallholders, and still stinking strongly from the skins piled behind the Guildhall – or was it the Shire Hall, what had bellman Isaac Moule said was which. Was John Mortlock still manning his apple-sellers stall outside his uncle's bank, or had he yet realised the truth of the transaction that had deprived him of his inheritance.

The carrier clattered to a stop, dismounted, and thrust sundry sacks of produce on to the cart, clouting the still-shivering Henry Pamment as he did so, and snarling as one of the begging fraternity ventured too near. Was he a nake, lurk or dreary grizzler, until he'd met scullion Wisken Pickwick had no idea there were such varieties of scroungers in Cambridge.

But then he had learnt so much and met so many people – Beverley the renegade student with his claims of undergraduate misbehaviour and university impropriety, refusing payment of college bills to shopkeepers like Sam Welldon the butcher – and how was his sick wife, he wondered. Perhaps her best remedy would be that adopted by the fen folk to ease their own form of misery, opium. Where had he heard of that - from the poor, hard-working but somehow dishonest Barnwell beer house contingent, with their tales of fenland riots, or was it the Jesus college porter.

Pickwick resolved then that he must keep a proper journal, recording the characters and experiences he was meeting, otherwise he would never remember them all, never be in a position to report to his friends in the Pickwick Club.

The cart jolted forward again, breaking his reverie, down behind the Guild – Shire Hall, along Slaughter House Lane towards Hog Hill where lions and tigers regularly roared, scaring Sophia and Mary Ann Bones, the mad women of St Andrew's Hill. Though who would not be scared knowing, or imagining, just what was going on in those university laboratories where hanged men were given electric shocks, and body snatchers found a ready market for their wares.

They turned left towards Emmanuel college, forced their way right across the traffic of St Andrew's street and set off at a steady clop towards Parker's Piece, scene of that great open air celebration of Victoria's coronation and dominated by the bleak sight of the Town Gaol. And there was his inn, the Castle, one of the oldest and most hospitable hostelries in Cambridge. It looked welcoming and inviting, he was ready for the rest it would provide. There was just one problem. The carrier carried on!

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Smith the surly carrier had no intention of stopping to allow Pickwick to dismount from his cart. He'd been cheated too often by too many people, and if he had to take hated Henry Pamment home to Linton he wanted to be sure he'd get his fare. And a down-on-his-luck shopkeeper was not to be relied upon, especially if he was parish constable to boot.

Smith's temper was inflamed further when two boisterous young men charged past on their horses, showering stones and dust everywhere. "Ruddy idiots – there are too many fools like that on the roads these days, especially during term time but whether the gaols will really be full of them after next October is another matter". And as Pickwick looked puzzled he explained the new rules that were to come into force whereby people convicted of careless and furious driving could be commited to a spell on the treadmill, like the one at the Town Gaol, instead of being letting off with a fine.

"And that'd bee too good for some of them, like those young gentlemen a couple of years ago who raced their horses from Tottenham to Cambridge for a £50 wager. They'd left London at 8.15 and got to Stump Cross, on Trumpington Road, just before noon, when one of the mares dropped down from exhaustion and died that evening. Nothing would have happened except people raised a subscription to indict them, and then when the case was heard one got let off and the other only fined £2.0.0. They said that the distance would not have been too great if the day had been cool, and that it had been cool when they started – anybody could have told them it sometimes gets hot in May!

"There's just too many problems travelling the road these days, and a carrier's job is hard and dangerous. I lost one of my best mates just a week or so ago, Isaac Carter. He was the carrier at Downham Market and was going to Wisbech in his cart when he stopped at the Red Hart inn, Nordelph, to take up some luggage. He was placing a large box in the vehicle when it struck the hinder part of the horse, making it start forward, and when Isaac tried to catch hold of the reins, he fell and the off-wheel passed over his body. They picked him up and carried into the public house but before many minutes had had passed life was totally extinct. He was respected as a sober, industrious man, and has left a wife and seven children to grieve for him – what future have they got now, stuck out in them fens

"The back in May 1836 young Hallam of Longstanton was returning from Cambridge with a cart loaded with deals and on reaching Girton the horse swerved to one side towards some

water. Some of the load shifted and hit against the side of the animal that reared up, and threw him on the ground. The waggon wheel passed over his thigh and his hand. They took him to Addenbrooke's but he died

"Mind you, if you get a good horse – not the thing that I've got – then it can make life a bit easier. Another chum of mine, James East, a waggoner who sometimes worked for Deacon was found lying dead on the Ely turnpike road between 11 & 12 one night. He'd got a some steady old horses who knew the route and so he did what we all do, he dozed off at the reins. We suppose he must have fallen from his seat and the wheels passed over his head killed him on the spot. Mr Turtle, driver of the Lynn mail coach, found him dead on the road – and that puzzled him, because he'd met the waggon a bit before and the horses had turned out of his road as regularly as if they had been guided.

Two passengers who were in the waggon didn't know anything about the accident till they came to the Stretham turnpike gate, several miles along the road. The horses stopped just as usual, but when the gatekeeper came looking for the driver to pay the toll there was no sign of him!

If that had been around here there would have been nothing left on the waggon. John Fitches of Swaffham got off his donkey to get a pint of beer at Burwell, leaving two sacks of beans lying across its back. No sooner had he sat down than he heard the donkey make a noise and saw a couple of local lads running down the lane with one of the sacks. He chased after them, but they got away. He saw them plain in the moonlight, even took them to court but they got away with it – chap named Davy it was, only he called himself Cammel – it's enough to give yer the hump!

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By now the carrier's cart had passed the new architecture of Downing college and the newly built rows of houses of the New Town were also dwindling behind them. It had been noticeable that Smith had been particularly grumpy and vigilant as he had passed this particular area. "That's a rum place, new roads get built every few minutes, more and more people crammed in, and the name's they've chosen! Who wants to remember King George IV and his coronation …"

By now the houses had entirely disappeared and the cart was in open countryside. Smith turned left at a fork and lapsed into moody silence as they creaked and rattled along the rough road that led towards the little village of Cherry Hinton, of which Pickwick had already heard so much. It was not a relaxing ride however for numerous other carts were also making their ways along the track, many loaded with clunch lime from the kilns there. The traffic had been even heavier the previous year apparently when many cartloads had been delivered for the foundations of the new Fitzwilliam Museum.

Pickwick got a good view of Dr Oke's new Hall at Cherry Hinton but hopes of inspecting for himself the village where the men wore smock frocks and the women red cloaks were dashed as the cart plodded onward towards a windmill which dominated the surrounding countryside from its lofty position.

"Fulbourn is a rum place too", opined the carrier. "Some say as how old Greaves of the Manor claimed that he'd got some special sorts of seeds that had come down from the skies, a present from the Gods, you might say. It was back in 1750, but I remember my dad telling me how he had to take a box-full of them to Cambridge to be put on a coach to the Royal Society in London. Some of them were bright pink, some of them ash-colour. Apparently an old lady went up to Mr Greaves to say how there'd been a hailstorm and several of the hailstones had beat down her chimney. When they'd melted they left seeds on the floor, which she swept up.

He told her to go home and look in the other rooms to see if she found any more. Then he gave the children instructions to look around the paths and see if they could find any laying there – and when they saw ducks pecking at anything they should shoo them away in case they were eating some of these special seeds.

"Then he went around his own house and he found about 100 of them that had come down his chimneys, but they weren't covered with soot. He was convinced they'd been carried inside the hailstones and they'd bounced when they hit the bottom of the chimney and ended up in the corners of the room. Then when the hail melted the seeds just laid there. He thought they were some sort of special ivy seeds but they were found where no ivy grew. Other people said they were wild garlic. Whatever they were I've never seen anything special growing along the grass verges of these road – nor the old ones either"

For the Fulbourn roads had apparently recently undergone great change as with Enclosure certain old tracks had been stopped up and new ones – such as the one they were now travelling- laid out. It was not a process that was welcomed by all, an appeal against the order to stop up Old Walden Way off Fulbourn Old Drift, had been heard in the courts not four years earlier. Thomas Irons who'd lived in the parish for 50 years got most upset when Mr Adeane's men built a wall across the old road and told him he'd got to go back. Not him – he'd always gone that way, he'd still go that way, and so he did. Only when he came back he found the gate locked against him. John Matthews backed him up, said how the new road was uphill nearly all the way. Mind you the old road was in a poor state, nothing had been done to it for 50 years and there was a swamp in the middle of it.

They toiled up Mill Hill – or Hanging Hill as it had previously been known - from where Pickwick obtained his first glimpse of the great cathedral at Ely, standing high above the intervening flatlands. At the smock windmill the carrier paused, delivering several parcels to miller John Chaplin, and taking the opportunity to jostle Henry Pamment at the same time. Pamment moaned, shivered, and huddled tighter into the rough covering of sacks that gave him some protection from the strong breeze on such an exposed place. Then they jolted off again into the village itself, where other farmers had stolen the church bells – at least in some people's eyes.

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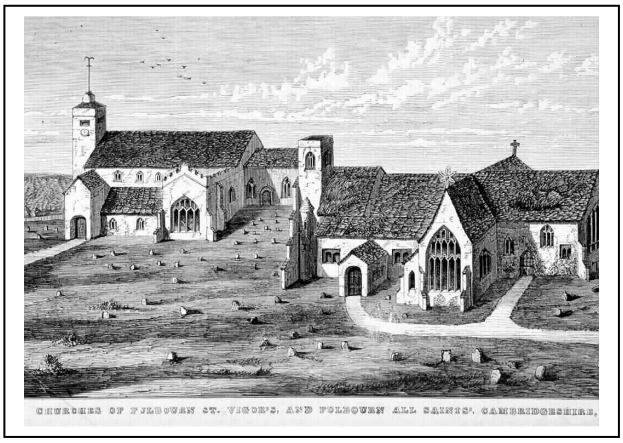
"Until 1776 there were two churches in the same churchyard in this village", explained carrier Smith. "Now don't get confused with Swaffham Prior, where they've still got two churches, nor Histon – its Fulbourn I'm talking about. One was called All Saints and the other St Vigor's. The tower of All Saints stood within nine feet from the chancel of St Vigors, but over the years it got weaker and weaker. Then at five o'clock in the morning of Trinity Sunday 1766 it collapsed, causing great damage to the nave.

Fulbourn folk aren't people to do much in a hurry – otherwise they'd have fixed the tower in the first place, so they thought about things for several years. Then they got an Act of Parliament so they could unite the two parishes in the one remaining church and sell off the materials and bells of the ruined church to defray the cost. The rector's churchwarden, Edward Hancock, conducted it through both houses of Parliament without the expense of a solicitor.

But the village folk were very attached to their old bells, two of which just lay broken for years amongst the rubble of the ruined church. They used to mount a watch over them each night, in case somebody carried them off and sold them. But after a while, when nothing happened, they left off watching – and it was then that the churchwardens struck.

They hid a waggon in Monk's barn nearby, and when it was dark, and nobody was looking, they collected up the two broken bells and took them to Cambridge to put on the waggon for St Neot's. When villagers found out what had happened they got most upset and one of them – some say it was William Rolfe – put out a ballad



There are some farmers in Fulbourn town,
They have lately sold what was not their own;
They have sold the bells, likewise the church,
And cheat the poor of twice as much.
And 0! you Fulbourn farmers 0!

Before the bells they could be sold,
They were forc'd to swear, as we've been told,
They forswore themselves - then they cried,
For this, my boys, we shall be tried.
And 0! you Fulbourn farmers 0!

There's old Twig, and young Twig - the whining dissenter,
Says one to the other, this night we will venture;
And says little Gibble-Gabble, I long for to go,
But first I will call my neighbour Swing-toe:
And 0! you Fulbourn farmers 0!

In the dead of night this thievish crew
Broke into the church, as other thieves do,
For to steal the bells and sell them all,
May the devil take such churchwardens all;
And 0! you Fulbourn farmers 0!

The three good bells together with the three others from St Vigor's also went away, but only after a vestry meeting agreed to put a new peal of six bells together. And just to make sure they got away safely the people put them on a waggon which they drew themselves for a furlong or so, till the going got harder and they put the horses on.

They were back within a year & Edmund Salisbury rode up on the great bell when it was drawn up into the steeple – and his was the first death the bell was rung for when he was buried two months later in July 1776. The motto on the bell is "I to the church the living call – And to the grave I summon all".

Now I don't mind them tolling to commemorate the dead but when you get people like Charles Dawson put together what he calls his "Fulbourn Surprise" peal and you hear them clanging and jangling across the fields, well that would be enough to drive even Ezekiel Law to drink"

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Smith's carrier's cart turned right from Fulbourn, heading south into rolling countryside. All the way it creaked ever upwards, till at the top of a ridge they reached an ancient track which was apparently an old Roman road linking Cambridge with Colchester, the way marked by two barrows, called by local people the "Two penny loaves". But the present way was fairly new, funded by William Worts who'd left £1,500 for the construction of a causeway about a hundred years earlier.

The highest summit of the hill was crowned by a circular camp, defended by a strong double entrenchment with openings to the North and South. Smith said it was one of a chain of forts stretching from Audley End in Essex to the fens, with others at Littlebury, Chesterford, Grantaceaster, Arbury

and Belsar's Hill. It was no place to linger. Its name, Vandlebury reflected the savage warfare that had previously ravaged this part of the country. But it was not the vandals that worried Smith so much as the ghosts that haunted the site.

"I never like to come this way at night ever since Whyman told me one of his tales. He says how 700 years ago a dead knight roamed around this Vandlebury camp and how a live knight decided to challenge him to battle.

The live one was called Osborn & was a Knight of tried and well-known valour. He'd heard about the ghost & decided to kill it. So he told his squire to await his return at the only entrance to the camp, then rode in on his own. It was dark and spooky inside & even Osborn was a bit scared, but he yell out 'if there's a ghost here, let him come and meet his equal'. No sooner were the words out of his mouth when he saw a knight in full armour, mounted on a large black steed, with his lance at the ready. That gave him a start, but there was no going back now. Osborn charged, the two of them clashed in the middle of the circle and the black knight was knocked off his horse and stretched out on the grass. But quick as a flash the ghost picked up his spear and thrust it into Osborn's leg – and quick as a flash he disappeared, leaving his horse behind!

"Though wounded Osborn led the black horse out to where his squire waited for him, then they headed back to Cambridge as fast as they could gallop. They went to Cambridge castle where they tied the horse in the baron's stables and set a crowd of people to keep watch over it. As morning neared the horse became restive, it snorted hoarsely, its fierce eyes flashed terribly with streams of fire, it pranced and beat the ground with its feet and as the first cock crowed it broke to shivers the bonds that held it, darted across the castle yard and disappeared.

"Osborn meanwhile had been treated as a hero. It was only later when he was being helped out of his armour that he noticed he'd been wounded, his boot was full of blood. A skilful surgeon was called and dressed the wound, in a few days it was healed. But ever after, as long as he lived, when that particular day of the year came round, at the hour when he encountered that spectral knight, his wound broke out anew and bled during the night, causing him to suffer the most excruciating torments.

"And if that's not enough", added Smith, "there're giants up here, Gog and Magog, the last survivors of a race of giants who used to live in Britain. The rest were slain by a Trojan hero, Brutus, and these two took captive to London to work as porters at his palace." And here Pickwick could join in, for had he not seen these figures the previous year at the Lord Mayor's Show in London, part of a tradition that had dated back to medieval time. Why even in the 1600s writers had described how these two giants each fifteen feet high were drawn along in chariots, moving, talking and taking tobacco, to the great delight of the spectators. Indeed they still stood guard at the Guildhall.

They're still up here, somewhere, added the carrier, hiding just under the surface – figures carved out of the chalk by undergraduates, several people have seen them, though I've never stopped to search. You come this way when night is falling and the wind is howling and you hear the clanking noises and see them messages going through the air – you wouldn't stop neither". Clanking? Messages in the air? What was the man talking about?

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Pickwick had been regaled with tales of ghostly knights and mythical giants on the Vandlebury hills, but at least the bit about messages in the air was actually true.

Thirty years earlier, in 1808, England had been at war with France, and invasion by Napoleon Bonaparte was though to be imminent. Along the coats Martello towers had been erected to deter the enemy and in towns and villages across the land volunteer militia raised.

It was one thing to be ready to fight, another to know where and when to fight. Some form of communication was essential. By August 1808 a system of telegraphs had been constructed across the country. One line of 19 stations ran from London to Gt Yarmouth and the Gogs formed a vital part of the chain, relaying messages on to Royston in one direction & the King's Chair at Newmarket in the other.

A hut was erected around a heavy wooden frame some 20 feet high that held six large shutters, in two banks of three. From their elevated position the watchers could see the adjacent stations and were able to repeat on any signals received. Speed was of the essence and a rivalry developed as to who could forward the messages quickest. There were of course problems; when Norwich was in full smoke it was difficult to see their signals, foggy days were difficult and rain showers could seriously hinder important messages. To counter these eventualities each station kept a speedy horse ready to gallop over to the next telegraph station to deliver the signal in writing.

The Gogs station had been staffed with three men, at least two of whom were on "glass" duty each day, peering through their telescopes for incoming messages, and recording them in a log book, together with a day by day weather forecast. They were meant to time them too – except when Robert Petch went off with the watch.

The success of the system was summarised in a poem written at the time

"If you'll only just promise you'll none of you laugh
I'll be after explaining the French Telegraph
A machine that's endowed with such wonderful pow'r
It writes reads and sends 50 miles in an hour
Then there's watchwords, a spyglass, an index on hand
And many more things none of us understand
But which, like the nose on your face, will be clear
When we have as usual improved on them here,
Adieu, penny post! mails and coaches adieu!
Your occupation's gone, t'is all over wid you
In your place telegraphs on our houses we'll see
To tell time, conduct lightning, dry shirts and send news"

The system may have been speedy, but it was far from silent. When being worked the substantial shutters made a loud clanking noise and the wind that whipped across the hills whistled through the structure – no wonder it scared the daylights out of carriers' horses and their owners whose minds were already full of ghosts, giants and their next delivery.

Having heard some much about Vandlebury Pickwick was anxious to view the place for himself, but was quickly informed by the diver that this was not a good idea. For a great mansion had been erected in the middle of the ancient hill fort and the old right of way stopped up. It was now the home of Baron Godolphin and his horses – and he must have heard of the Goldolphin Arabian and his cat, one of the most famous of racing stallions discovered drawing a water cart in Paris and now buried in splendour at the estate. Now the carrier had visited regularly carrying stoves and chimney pieces for the recent restorations – he was welcome. Pickwick, obviously an educated gentleman would be welcome, but to take the character in the rear of their cart, the shivering and sneezing Henry Pamment, anywhere near Lord Godophin after what had occurred at Linton five years ago – well that was not a good idea at all!

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It had been just before Christmas 1832 that Lord Godolphin, with Henry John Adeane of Babraham Hall, MP for Cambridgeshire and Mr W. P. Hammond, had attended at petty sessions court at Linton to hear a case against the landlord of the Crown Inn. It was just the normal day-to-day activity of such magistrates.

It did not end up that way. The chief witness, who had laid evidence against the landlord, a chap named Mason, found a mob of very angry Linton men waiting for him as he tried to leave the courtroom. It was obvious he was not going to get back to his home without getting beaten up. Lord Godolphin and his fellow magistrates went out to see what was happening and begged the men to disperse. They would not. So Godolphin swore in a number of people to act as special constables and then the whole batch of them went out to escort Mason back to his house. It was quite a procession, their Lordships, the witness and a surrounding bodyguard of pressed men.

They did not get far before somebody threw some mud and gravel at Godolphin which hit him on the back. One of the constables grabbed the culprit and a struggle ensued while the rest of the party carried on. They got Mason home safely and were returning to the court when things got hotter still. The chap who'd thrown the mud at Godolphin had been taken to Mr Fisher's yard and the mob broke down the gates in a determined effort to rescue him.

Mr Holmes, the Linton surgeon was one of those sworn in as constable. He told the trial "I heard a buzz behind me and saw Wright in custody and saw Thomas Crane pulling on the skirts of his coat trying to rescue him. Elijah Pammenter was clapping his hands and shouting. Then part of a brick grazed my collar and struck Mr Fisher's gate. I advanced towards the Crown inn and was struck in the back by a stone. Shortly afterwards I heard Mr Adeane cry out "My God! I'm struck!" the crowd were then following at a distance of about ten yards. Mr Adeane nearly fell, then rose, reeled and collapsed in my arms. He had a cut nearly through his scalp, just above the left ear. He was out for some days afterwards and even after a week the wound was swollen and inflamed and he was in considerable danger"

So now Adeane was down, and Lord Godolphin was struck on the head with a bludgeon; he tried to wrestle with the chap, but the mob surrounded him and the lad ran off. It was all getting very ugly. Holmes took hold of his staff prepared to defend himself – he would hit hard if he had to. The mob was getting more and more agitated, there were sticks and stones being thrown, and then somebody yelled out "blast their eyes and limbs smash them all" then "Go and get guns and damn the men that won't stick to their guns".

By the time it got to trial in March 1833 things were being seen in another light. Daniel Day, chief constable of the Linton division said he didn't think the conduct or language of the mob was really very violent, and that the men had acted civilly and respectfully towards the magistrates. Mr Adeane's wound had been made worse by mental excitement – and the fact that he'd started canvassing again before it was well. It was just the informer that they wanted to get at.

This was no excuse. The Judge could not have men trying to take the law into their own hands, let alone assault people of the stature of Lord Godolphin. Ten of them were sentenced to imprisonment with hard labour. "They're all out now", said carrier Smith, "& I'm not going to provoke them by getting involved with anybody representing law and order, like that chap in the back of this cart"

Tom Smith's carrier's cart jolted and lurched its way towards Linton and with each bump came a moan from Henry Pamment, sprawled out in the back and obviously not improving since his immersion in the River Cam.

A stately mansion loomed up on the right hand side of the road, perhaps here somebody would respond to a plea for assistance, wondered Pickwick. But once more surly Smith would have no deviation from his route. "I don't want nothing to do with foreigners and you'll get no charity from Babraham – at least not if what they say about them is true. They reckon that in the time of Bloody Mary there was an Italian chap, Sir Horatio Palavicini who was appointed by the Pope to collect the money due to him. But when Queen Elizabeth came to the throne he took the opportunity of hanging on to the Catholic money and used it to benefit himself. He got himself into favour with the new Queen and commanded one of the English men of war in the battle with the Spanish Armada in 1588. Soon after that he's said to have bought himself that estate you can see.

"When he died his widow mourned for bit but after a year and a day she married again to a chap called Sir Oliver Cromwell – no not the Protector, his uncle. And then shortly afterwards two of Sir Horatio's sons married two of Sir Oliver's daughters – on the same day. Well the eldest son, Sir Toby Palavinci did what most of them do – he squandered his inheritance and sold off the Babraham estates and to cut a complicated story down a bit it came down to the Adeane's who have it now.

"Somewhere in between it was owned by the Bennett family and about 1722 Judith Bennett got left a considerable estate by her nephew on condition that when she died she would leave £1,000 for charitable uses. Then her brother left her another thousand to build and endow a free school and almshouse for six poor widows or old maids. Well in her will she left £500 to build the school, and £100 a year to support it and the old ladies. It was a generous settlement, the schoolmaster getting £20 a year, the almswomen £30 as well as an extra £12 a year for clothes and £10 for their firing, and the rest went to apprenticing and clothing children. The folk at Babraham thought they were in clover.

"Only there was a snag, one of the legacies was pronounced void and the money for the school and almshouses was cut down to £50. Then the charity affairs were badly managed and great arrears built up and there was court cases and what not – a right mess".

By now Smith was casting anxious glances at the sky, trying to bully some greater speed from his horse. "I don't like it, not at all", he murmured. "This bit of the road, near Abington, is where just two years ago I got caught in a storm like there's never been before in all my years on the road. It was a June Saturday and the wind come up strong. There were flashes of lightning, awful peals of thunder and then hailstones – only they were more like oblong pieces of ice, about an inch long. It really pelted down, flattering the crops and nearly cutting me and my horse to pieces. We had to take shelter under that bank of trees for about a quarter of an hour. Then the wind veered and blew it over Hildersham where it did more damage. There were about 400 panes of glass broke at Abington Hall, the Lodge and the Vicarage. Mind you it's an ill wind that don't blow anybody any good and that gave me work for a while, making several extra journeys to deliver the stuff they wanted for repairs.

"Had it been a few years earlier I could never have done it, for the roads around Hildersham were the worst in the country. There was one bit in particular on the road to Balsham where it runs in a hollow, closed in on the right and left hand by banks, which was virtually impassable, and the road is so narrow you can't turn round. You pay your toll at the Abington

gate and you should be guaranteed able to get along the road – but that just proves that this is not a place to linger – unless of course you want to try your luck with old Mortlock the banker at Abington Hall". But Pickwick had heard enough of their affairs to wish to become embroiled in such a family feud.

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The carrier turned his cart off the main road and jolted into the village of Hildersham where he had to make a delivery to the Rev Charles Goodwin, the rector.

For a professional transporter Tom Smith did not seem very organised for he had to rummage in the back of his cart for some time before he found all of the several wrapped packages from George Barraclough, a bookseller on Senate House Hill, Cambridge. Whether they contained prayer books, bibles or the latest novels Pickwick was unable to venture, but whatever they were they seemed to be weighty and caused the surely Smith to expend not only much energy but also a certain amount of profanity in their transportation.

Whilst all this was going on Pickwick took the opportunity to inquire of the other occupant of the back of the cart, Henry Pamment, the Linton parish constable, still shivering following his immersion in the polluted waters of the Cam. He found him somewhat stronger, though still far from well, which was fortunate for they knew they must soon abandon their reluctant transporter and make their own way into Linton.

Whilst pondering their situation they were joined at the cart by the shuffling figure of an ancient village rustic, who walked a few steps, stopped and panted for breath. Seeing a couple of strangers in his part of the world he took no time in expanding on his condition.

"Its mort'l swinky, ain't it so? I think't dew be the hottest I've knowed for forty years or so. It's made me sweat this afternoon! Seems like there mun be thunder soon. I can't stant wot I used to could; bein' in my seventy-nine to-year come Martinmas".

Pickwick inquired after the old chap's general health. "Ah-h!! Purty good; there ain't much ailing – I can hear, an' see, an' take my pinto o'beer. A twinge o'room'tiz now and 'gain dew touch me sharp. That's 'bout the wu'st. But, thank the Lord, I han't much pain; altho', as it's go so much rust, I 'spec's the biler's nigh on bu'st. I fetch my breath so short! I carn't breathe right, an' like as I should ought. It's shaller, shaller!" and here he placed a hand on his chest to show whence he was drawing his breath, then laid it on his stomach to show whence he ought to draw it

But surely there must be some doctor, even in such an isolated – and clearly run down – parish such as this one. "No! I sharn't take doctor's stuff. I've tuk a mort an' still I fetch my breath so short". And here he glanced around the ensure there was nobody else in earshot, and lowered his voice as he confided. "This mornin', when I fu'st got up, I tuk a good handful of shot tew keep my lights down: an' they've drop a lot since mornin'. Yes! A lot! I'll soon be better. Lor'! 'Tis hot!" And with that the old chap panted away

It was time for Pickwick and Pamment to depart too, before the carrier returned. Their way lay on a rough footpath running to the south of a stream. It was a landscape Pamment had known well, though one he might soon not recognise, as the process of inclosure was transforming so much of the countrside.They skirted the humps and lumps of Little Linton farm and approached the outskirts of the village itself..

Now when he should be feeling happy to be returning home, Pamment became more ill at ease. Pickwick recalled their earlier conversation about his previous hardships, knew how he and his wife had turned their backs on London for the security of his home village, only to find everybody turning against him. But at last the companions reached the door of a small cottage. There was some delay before a woman's frail voice responded to their knocking, but then the door opened and the smile that

greeted her husband's return seemed to lighten the darkness of the humble abode. Henry Pamment was home again, his wife and children were delighted to see him. The realisation that he had brought somebody else with him – another mouth to feed, another body to sleep, was not allowed to cause more than a slight flicker of annoyance to cross the face that welcomed them.

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It was the matter of a few moments before Henry Pamment, his teeth still chattering, was helped up the rickety stairs to the bed chamber above, where various small heads looked up from tattered covering before being reassured and turning back to sleep. Pickwick could not really see to count in darkness of that crowded room where bedding of some sort or other seemed to fill virtually all the space.

Pickwick helped Sarah Pamment lay her husband down in the space nearest the window before the two of them returned to the cramped room below. Inevitably she was worried, for – as he knew – things had not gone well for them since they had returned to Linton from London. If anything happened to Henry how would she cope in this friendless place.

"I heard tell about that poor family from Lt Downham and wonder if that wouldn't be the best for us too", she moaned. Pickwick could not cope with weeping women but tried to keep her talking – what was this case she had mentioned?

"It was February last year – a very cold month. The lady had whitewashed the bedroom – which was a silly thing to do that time of year, they should clean in Spring time, not winter. Well come nightfall the room was still damp so she took the wood and turf ashes out of her oven, where she had been baking, put them in a pan and carried them upstairs. They'd only got a small room and she put down the pan on her husband's side of the bed, nearest the window. Then they all went up to sleep, her baby in the bed between them".

It was the classic scenario for tragedy – how often had Pickwick heard of similar cases where the coals would set fire to bedding and the room be burnt out, or the baby suffocated by being crushed between its parents. But no, this was different.

"Come morning there was no sign of life. The neighbours didn't hear the husband pumping water, like he did every morning, or cursing that the pump had frozen solid and needed to be thawed. There was none of the usual baby cries. It was too quiet. After a while one of them clambered up to the chamber window and looked inside. It was a scene of horror. They broke down the door and rushed in.

"The wife lay dead in the bed. Her husband was out of bed, on his wife's side of the bed, laying partly on the floor and partly on the bed, in a state of insensibility – but still breathing. They laid him beside his dead wife but within the hour he was dead as well. The infant lay quiet and still – they thought it was dead too, but then it moved its little hand, so they took it outside. Then they called for Mr Cole, the medical gentleman.

"He thought they were poisoned from the fumes of the charcoal. The husband must have woken up because he was nearest the window. There was draughts from the gaps around the glass and where rags had been put in place of some broken panes, and this together with fresh air that came up from where the floor had shrunk away from the wall had kept him alive. But then he went round to his wife's side of the bed, where the fumes had really built up and it got to him. The baby, poor mite, had been miraculously preserved by being covered over with bedclothes.

"The jury brought in that the wife had dried from suffocation produced by the noxious fumes of charcoal being in the bed-room in which she had been sleeping and that her husband had died from apoplexy produced by the same cause. The little baby was left for her grandmother to bring up – but I

wouldn't trust any of our children to relations here. They'd soon end up in the parish workhouse like the other poor souls, being learned all manner of nonsense".

Eventually Sarah regained something of the composure and fighting spirit that had already seen her through so many hardships. She made her way upstairs, leaving Pickwick to sleep fitfully finding what comfort he could on the sad furniture of the foetid room. [CH 11.2.1837]

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Pickwick spent a disturbed night in the Linton cottage. Every bone in his body ached from the jolting of the carrier's cart and every time he started to doze in his chair by the dead hearth the cottage would creak alarmingly or there would come some fresh scrabbling from within the walls, some furtive scuttling across the floor. Yet eventually his exposure to so much exercise and fresh air the day before overcame all this and he lapsed into sleep, only to be woken again by a different sound – light footsteps and a suppressed sob. He opened his eyes to see the figure of Sarah Pamment looking down on him

"I knew something terrible would befall Henry", she confided, "I told him he should not cross the witch, but he would not listen. He said I was a silly superstitious woman, but everybody here knows that there always were witches and there always will be witches. They're in league with the Devil and have special powers so you must go out of your way to stay in her good books.

"But when he was on his way to Horseheath the other day the old witch appeared and asked him where he was going. He told her to mind her own business but when he got half a mile form our house he heard something in the hedge behind him. He had a look and it was one of her imps. So what did the silly man do – he chased the imp, but the faster he ran, the faster the imp ran till that got to where the old witch stood. She quickly caught it up and placed it in her boson – they always carry them there, or under her armpits – she takes them to church with her!"

"They say you're safe provided the witch doesn't possess anything belonging to you - but how can you be sure she's not picked up a piece of your broken crockery or taken a spring from the garden hedge - that's all she needs to give her power over you.

"She can put a spell on your dough so the bread doesn't rise or your on coal so it won't burn. She can influence animals, making horses stop dead in their tracks, pigs go off their feed, and cows stop giving milk. She can even send swarms of fleas to bite her victims". And here Pickwick involuntarily scratched himself and seemed to sense myriads of mites crawling through his hair.

"You can protect yourself. Some old ladies will come into our shop and buy a halfpenny worth of salt without saying please or thank you for it – most of them don't speak anyway so its hard to know if they're breaking the witch's curse or just being normal. But you can put a piece of steel under your doormat - for a witch cannot cross steal, and a knife under the chair will stop her sitting down if she does come in.

But surely this was just village superstition, spread about some venerable old woman who preferred her own company, or that of her cat, to that of village incomers – such as Sarah newly arrived form London.

"No, one place where I worked I met a girl come from Horseheath. Whenever she returned to the village for her holiday she always used to leave the witch a few pence before going back

to London. And once the witch sent her a present of some currants she'd grown in her own garden, but the girl dared not eat them in case she was bewitched herself.

"She told me that to make the contract the Devil usually appeared to the witch in the shape of an animal such as a rat, mouse or toad – so whenever I see a toad or newt in this house I put it on the fire straight away. Of course I can't catch all the mice, and you're bound to have rats. But the very worst thing is when you see one of her imps – it looks like a mouse but with very large eyes and a tail only two inches long. I saw one on top of that box in the chimney corner and as soon as it saw me that scrambled up the chimney to report what it had seen to the witch! You can't keep anything secret from her and her imps.

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"Once the Devil has recruited his witch", continued Sarah Pamment in her Linton cottage, "she becomes possessed with several of these imps or spirits which live on her body and unless she gives them plenty of work to do they become a terrible torment to her. They say the Horseheath witch has seven to keep going. She's given them their own names – Bonny, Blue Cap, Red Cap, Jupiter & Venus – and another one I can't remember".

But surely there must be some way of fighting back, suggested Pickwick.

"One village lady told me how she had a brood of young ducks, and they were bewitched and covered with vermin – they just turned on their backs, kicked up their little feet and were dying fast. So she sent to the shop for an ounce of new pins and stuck them in one of the dead ducks at midnight, without telling anybody what she was going to do. She put that duck right in the middle of the fire and before that duck had been burning ten minutes the old witch came screaming to her door, making the most terrible noises – for the pain caused by those pins in that burning duck had entered the witch. In the morning all the rest of the ducks was cured!

"But there's another remedy to break the witch's power. You get a pint and a half glass bottle, half fill it with water, put in a lock of hair from the noddle of your neck, an ounce of new pins – head downwards, some rusty nails from an old shoe and some pairings of your finger and toe nails. Then you cork the bottle and put it on the fire at midnight, when you're quite alone, and you boil it till it bursts. But you must not speak whatever happens. The witch will come outside creaming and ranting – and sometimes you just can't keep quiet, but as soon as you make a noise before that bottle bursts that ain't no good".

Pickwick got the distinct impression that had he not been in that room then there would already have been a bubbling bottle on the smouldering embers.

But what happened when the witch died. "She don't die, at least not until she can find someone to take care of her imps. There was one old woman in the next village when she was dying nobody could stay in the room with her because of the sulphur which came from her nose and mouth - and she wouldn't have died except for the nurse. Witch told her not to open a certain hutch she kept in the room, but the old nurse would not listen. She looked in and there was a red underskirt - the imps was wrapped up in it and escaped

"Sometimes they tried to burn the imps – that happened at West Wickham. They put them in a well-heated brick oven but it was as much as two strong men with pitchforks could do to keep the imps from bursting the oven door open and the men were terrified by the strength of the imps who screamed and cried like a lot of little children. They screamed so loud they had to be taken out and were returned to the witch – and she was covered all over with burns, but the imps weren't marked. Eventually they were put in her coffin and buried with her."

Pickwick sat horrified both at the thought that such beliefs could be prevalent in the 1830s – had nothing been learned since the sixteenth century when Oliver Cromwell's grandmother died at Warboys supposedly after being bewitched by Alice Samuel with her wrinkled face, hairy lip and squeaking voice. What sort of a place had he come to?

And now Sarah asked him a favour. He had done so much for her husband already, would he now do something else, something sure to cure the fever with which his body was increasingly racked. And no it had nothing to do with witchcraft, it just required a visit to the blacksmith's.

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It was a strange mission that Pickwick offered to undertake first thing next morning. Carrying an old jug he made way through streets already busy with the traffic and general bustle of country life. A queue was forming around the village pump and he was aware of the eyes that followed him as he made his way through the village.

Eventually he reached his destination, the blacksmith's shop. He recognised it immediately for it was of a type he had seen at various places during his travels. The large door extending from floor to eaves which could be opened and fastened back was shut but beside was a stable door, the top half of which was open. He peered in.

Pickwick called, but there was no answer, so he stepped inside into a sea of dust. Everywhere there was dust. As he walked from the hard earth floor of the stall to the forge itself so he walked into an ever-increasing depth of dust which reached four inches and more around the anvils. The dust was light and floury, pale grey in colour and rose in puffs around his feet at every step. It almost disguised the clutter on the floor into which he blundered as his eyes looked up.

The building was open to the tiles, the roof-space between the joists and rafters being used for storage; from every rafter hung huge festoons of dusty cobwebs from whose shelter hairy spiders of large size and ancient lineage maintained a malignant and disapproving watch on him as he entered.

There was a stout partition occupying one third of the floor space which would accommodate two horses if needed and the rest was the forge itself. Two anvils each mounted on a great section of tree trunk faced each other across the floor. Two benches lined the walls, one cluttered with tools, rasp, files, chisels; the other loaded with bags of horseshoe nails. Larger items too big to rest on benches overflowed on the floor, an iron plough leaned drunkenly, a pile of discarded horseshoes and odds and ends of iron took up more floor space.

At the far end was the brick built hearth with its short brick chimney. On the left of the hearth stood vertical bellows with a long wooden arm, its tapered handle polished by years of use, on the right a pile of fuel. And there in front stood a tank full of water for quenching the hot iron in which the tongs, pinchers and other tools were kept permanently half-submerged. This was what he had come to find. Perhaps he could do what he had to do and be gone.

It was not to be. Suddenly the gloom was enlightened as the great door swung open, and then a giant shadow was cast and the rafters echoed as a thunderous voice rang out to enquire just what he was doing there.

Pickwick looked up into the face of the blacksmith, a mighty man, six foot tall and approaching middle age. He wore a cap well grimed with soot and smoke, pulled down over

his dark hair; he had a straggling black moustache and an overnight stubble of beard. His leather apron was belted below his middle-age spread and came down below his knees.

The blacksmith's suspicious countenance took in the portly figure of Pickwick, the clothes covered in dust from his journey now even dustier and more than a little dishevelled from his restless attempts to sleep in the rickety cottage chair.

"I know you", he roared – "you're that gentleman wot got a ride from Cambridge with Tom Smith on his carrier's cart, and then run off without paying the fare! He's bin round the village hollaring about it, and what he'll do to you and Pamment when he gets hold of you. You've made a bad enemy there – and of course he's a regular customer of mine!

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Faced with the formidable figure of the Linton blacksmith Pickwick visibly quaked.

"Yes, Smith and his carrier's business keep me in work, and I've got to keep in with him, like I have with the rest of the horsekeepers and farmers in this village – even Fred Day, and he's a miserable beggar too!

"He's got a team of huge Shire horses, magnificent beasts deserving more care and grooming than he gives them. But he's a cunning fellar. He'll always leave off bringing his horses to me until a rainy day when he can't work them in the fields. Then he'll send one of the farm boys with it. That lad will wait till he sees that I've gone to quench my thirst then he'll sneak in, tie up the beast in that stall and flee for his life. They usually hide just around the back of that shed where they think I can't see them, but I know they're there

"Then a bit later I'll come back to be confronted by a blooming great monster, its coat steaming and the feathering round its hooves clogged up with great gobbets of mud, clay and manure. And what's worse that will usually have greasy legs! Of course I know all the horses in the district and know quite well where this one comes from. So then I start my act and curse the absent owner. "Hah Fred Day! Yew cunning old beggar, yew allus leaves your horses 'ere when yew can't work 'em. What a ruddy state. Look at them legs". Then I make a show of grumbling and puffing through my moustache while I clean off the horses legs with a piece of old sacking and find out what shoe replacements are needed.

"By this time a group of small boys will be looking over the top of them half doors, watching me cleaning up the hoof, shaping up the shoe and trying it while hot for fit. The clouds of pungent smoke swirl around and I'll puff, cough a bit and blow through me moustache. As I let the hoof drop I'll looked up and see a row of little heads staring at me over the door, "What yew staring at? What yew boys want", I yell. "Nothing" they'll stammer back. "Well yew slubber orf 'ome duz yew'll get 'urt. Goo on. Ruddy boys" and away they vanish. Of course they'll be back again a few minutes later. I did it, and I hope my children will do it too.

"During the gathering gloom of a winter evening, I'll often be working on to complete some job or other by the dull light of the fire, but when I pump the bellows handle the air blows the fire into a white heat and for that second or two you can see the whole smithy lit up, and then the shadows rush back again, and them old spiders will retreat back up to the rafters – it's a part of the village life and has been for centuries.

"It's not just the shoeing. there's the repairs to ploughs and implements, farmers round here are as poor off as everybody else but even they have got to keep their tools in working order. And when there's a big job like a cart-wheel to re-tyre then you need help from the men of the village – they'll be a nice little gathering get here some nights, they'll be gossiping away while I'm sweating and cursing – which they think is in jest"

Was he joking, or was he not. And what was Pickwick doing there in the first place. His request was so ridiculous yet it had been explained so precisely by Sarah Pamment. In order to break her husband's fever he was to bring back a jug of water – not just any water but that rusty-coloured concoction into which the blacksmith plunged his hot implements. That water contained powerful elements that would be sure to effect a cure. To his surprise it was a request that was accepted as a normal part of the services provided by the smith, though there was of course some small consideration that had to be paid – well business was business.

As the blacksmith stirred the brew to release as much of the goodness as possible Pickwick heard the rumble of cartwheels coming down the street, the steady clopping of horseshoes ceased and the daylight darkened as a figure entered. Pickwick tried to place the anvil between himself and the new arrival, lest it be carrier Smith.

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The new arrival at the Linton smithy was indeed a carrier, but one whose journeys carried him far beyond the bounds of the county of Cambridge. For the new arrival was making a trip he had made many times before, conveying his wares to sell at what had been, in his childhood one of the greatest of fairs. Now however he was like Pickwick, stranded in this little village and without the blacksmith's skills this would be one fair he would not attend.

They retired outside to inspect the traveller's cart, the wheel of which had broken, a new rim would be required and that was a task needing some considerable assistance from the blacksmith's friends and neighbours. This would be some small recompense for the happy gossiping hours they had spent warming themselves at his anvil. Once repairs were complete then Pickwick would be welcomed to accompany the newcomer back to Cambridge. In the meantime he had his own errand to fulfil.

It took him some time to retrace his steps to Pamment's shop, pausing whenever he heard the sound of a horse and cart to ensure it was not carrier Smith. Henry was somewhat stronger after his night's rest, the rusty-coloured water from the blacksmith would add further to his cure. Sarah had lighted a fire in the grate, despite the rising temperature outside, for how else would there be hot water. Such firing was an expensive part of the family's expenses, little wonder poor men took the opportunity to ransack woods for any branches that might be found. It would have been much easier if Robert Millicent had been successful in his mining business – something locals still discussed, though it had all been nearly 100 years before.

Mining – here in Cambridgeshire, quizzed Pickwick. Yes indeed, as Henry related

"As you know I was born at Barham, but long before my time Millicent was Lord of the Manor. Being a Londoner he found the area damp and cold and so he decided to prospect for coal. The spot he chose was on the boulder clay cap of a chalk hill – still known as Coal Hole, between Borley Wood and Wool Street. He might have been nearer coal in the valley, but he was an apothecary so what did he know.

"He got John Disbrow, who was an apothecary here in Linton, and uncle to Millicent's wife, to draw up an agreement that he hoped people would sign. They would put up a sum of money towards 'the opening, digging & boring a certain pitt or pitts in or upon the soil or waste ground called Linton Heath for the finding or discovering of a coal mine thereon'. The agreement went on to specify that should they be successful subscribers should be entitled to two hundredweight of coal for every shilling they had subscribed, & in case by chance no coal was found they would be entitled to a share of whatever money had not already been spent in the fruitless quest.

“Some of the village traders thought this was a good opportunity to make money, not through the discovery of coal, but through the supply of picks and shovels to those who would be digging for it. And the beer sellers were convinced their fortunes would be made for it would be thirsty work.

“In the end only Robert Millicent himself actually put any money into the scheme, though others donated their labour. They started digging for coal in June 1737 and employed up to seven men – paying them 1s.3d. a day. After six months they’d found nothing, and after writing to other coal miners in Yorkshire to see how they did things up there, they gave up. Mind you had they been successful it would have transformed the economy and brought some prosperity to this miserable place, they’d be no need for youngsters like me to leave to seek our fortunes elsewhere”.

But now it was time for Pickwick to take his leave. With every good wish he left behind his new friends, carrying with him a parcel of home-made produce which the family would not allow him to decline. Once more he made his way back to the blacksmith’s shop where the wheel was fixed, the horses harnessed and the blacksmith and company intent on the tale being told by the heavily-built traveller of how he came to have the name of ‘Lightfoot’

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“I’ve been attending Stirbitch Fair for 77 years”, the traveller told his audience at the Linton blacksmith’s. “I went with my father, who was a trader before me, when I was but a lad and that was where I was christened Lightfoot.. It was in the Robin Hood, at the back of the Garlic Row, for its there on the evening of the horse-fair day that anybody attending for the first time is initiated. It’s a custom that’s continued every year and I’ve been through it so many times now. I’ll show you how it works”.

And here he looked around for a victim – and spotted Pickwick. Two of the company seized him, removed his shoes and sat him down in an old somewhat dusty chair. Then two candles were produced, one held by each of his ‘sponsors’ while Lightfoot donned an old academic gown and produced a book for one hand, a bell for the other.

He began the ceremony by asking ‘Is this an infidel’ – ‘Yes’. ‘What does he require’ – ‘Instruction’. ‘Where are the sponsors’. At this a jug of ale was placed on the table and the officiator chanted a doggerel:

“Over thy head I ring this bell,
Because thou art an infidel,
And I know thee by thy smell”

The company were then led in a chorus:

“With a hoccius proxius mandamus
Let no vengeance light on him,
And so call upon him”

“This child was born in the merry month of May,
Clap a pound of butter to his cheek, and it will soon melt away,
And if he longs for a sop, let him have it pray – ”

And the chorus was repeated.

“This child’s shoes are made of running leather,
He’ll run from father and mother the deuce knows whither,
And here he may run the length of his tether”

Once more the chorus was echoed, the chanters growing in confidence.

“This child now to Stirbitch fair is come,
He may wish to kiss a pretty wench ere he returns home
But let him be advised and not to Barnwell roam”

The audience chuckled as they recited their piece, aware of the reputation that Barnwell had for wicked women. But the officiators rounded on them with due gravity. ‘Who names this child?’ ‘We do’. Now his sponsors had to find a name – ‘Picky-wicky’, ‘Tom’s tormentor’, ‘Carrier’s curse’ were amongst those offered. The officiator then drank and gave Pickwick a bumper too.

“Picky-wicky shall henceforth be his name,
Which to confess let him not feel shame,
Whether ’fore master, miss or dame”

“With a hoccius, proxius ….”

“The child having first paid his dues,
Is welcome then to put on his shoes,
And sing a song, or tell a merry tale, as he may choose”

And here as the chorus was chanted Pickwick racked his brain for some contribution to the proceedings, resolving to describe something of his adventures in Dingley Dell in as light a fashion as befitted the situation. Once his tale had been concluded the verse started up again

“Then hand the can unto our jolly friar,
And laugh and sing as we sit round the fire,
And when our wine is out let all to bed retire”

And now the whole congregation roared out the chorus for the final time

“With a hoccius proxius mandamus
Let no vengeance light on him,
And so call upon him”

With a final cheer the proceedings were concluded. It was time for the company to depart. Pickwick,now the adopted son of the ancient traveller, clambered upon his waggon which turned out of Linton, heading back once more towards Cambridge and Stirbitch, wherever that was.

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As they jolted back towards Cambridge “Lightfoot” gave his account of the great Stirbitch fair. He could recall how his father had described it in its time one of the greatest international trade fairs in the whole of Europe. It would attract merchants from Venice and Genoa with their silks and velvets, Flemish weavers with their linen, Spaniards with their iron, Norwegians with tar and pitch, wines from France and Spain and – sometimes – Greece. They would arrive in early September at King’s Lynn and journey down the Ouse and Cam, past Littleport and Ely and on to Cambridge.

They would not be alone, from all over England tradesmen with their packhorses and wagons – like himself – would be negotiating the atrocious roads; from Halifax, Leeds and Rochdale came cloth, Birmingham sent iron and brass, Sheffield cutlery, Nottingham & Leicester glass & stockings. Lancashire wool would probably be bought by Norfolk manufacturers, hops grown in Surrey and Kent would be destined for northern breweries.

It was all something that had taken place since time immemorial – certainly it was there in 1211 when King John granted the income from the tolls, rents & other payments to support the Lepers' Hospital established near by. This had been swept away by the Reformation, along with the neighbouring priory of Barnwell, and then the town council and the University had squabbled about who was to have the money and administer the various activities. They reached a compromise that inevitably caused disagreement and friction – one year the mayor would proclaim the fair first, next year it was the University's turn.

"When it was the town's turn they'd all turn out in great numbers for the job – councillors, officers, members of parliament in grand procession, mounted on horseback and bedecked in official robes. They all arrive at the Garlic Row, near the old chapel and read out a Proclamation, then go to the court house and read it again. Then the Mayor will get down off his horse and open the court of pied-powder – they call it that because justice is done as quickly as dust can fall from your feet. It stands to reason in an area like a fairground, with so many deals being done, and bargains made, with people always coming and going there's no time to wait for judgement in a few weeks time – the traders would be gone and away.

"Then the Mayor and entourage set off again to the centre of the fairground, where there's a coffee house where they read it all again, and wash the dust from their throats. After that it's off to the Rose tavern or some other hostelry for a hard-earned feast of game or venison.

"Mind you the University lot are worse, Bedells and Proctors, Taxors and Commissary, Vice-Chancellor and the rest. They've usually started in the Senate House with mulled wine and sherry to wash down a variety of cakes. They all arrive in their carriages or on horseback, do the proclamations and then head off to the Oyster House where they dispatch their business – and a supply of oysters. Then its off to a partitioned off bit called the "University Dining Room" where there's more barrels of oysters with ale to wash it down.

"They then take a turn around the fairground while the waiters prepare the dinner. I had a peek in there once and never had I seen a feast like it. There was a large dish of herrings, then a neck of pork roasted, an enormous plum-pudding, a leg of pork boiled, a pease-pudding, a goose, a huge apple-pie, and a round of beef in the centre. Not just one pile – there was another the same at the other end of the table.

"Mind you the food was not what you might call exactly well-served. The waiters got it out as quick as they could and it was sometime before the University gentlemen actually got to it – well for one thing they had to push their way past the other customers of the Oyster House and they weren't too keen to let them through. Then the room was sweltering hot, and there were not a few bluebottles and flies attracted by the smell of the food – but by then the Dons were so well fed and watered they hardly noticed. Well that's the life of a University man ain't it – and talking of food, my belly's rumbling"

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Lightfoot the fair-man drew his cart into the shade of a clump of trees beside the road and foraged behind him for a morsel of bread and a hunk of cheese, which he proceeded to share with Pickwick. He in turn opened the parcel of home-made fare supplied by Sarah Pamment and between them they had a feast.

Before restarting their journey the traveller produced a sketch of the fairground at Stirbitch, a copy of which found its way into Pickwick's scrapbook. On it he marked the various rows and booths, some of which he labelled.

"Now what I've marked 'A' is the Leper chapel; that's where the fairground booths and other material is stored during the year, and during the fair its one of the favourite eating places. 'B' is the 'King's Arms' where the Pie Powder court is held. There's always a pair of stocks and a

whipping post outside of it. It's round here that you get the dealers in glass-ware, looking-glasses and items of mahogany furniture. Not far away is the oyster fair – large ones brought down from Lynn, about the size of a horse's hoof that you open with pincers. Of course you can also get smaller and more delicate ones from Colchester & Whitstable.

"Round where I've marked 'C' you'll find the booths occupied by wild beasts and wild men, conjurors, tumblers and rope-dancers. Small booths hold the dwarfs and giants, a larger one is where you get the travelling players and comedians from Norwich.

"Along the central roadway you get a range of shops, furniture sellers, ironmongers, silversmiths, jewellers, japaners and fine cutlery in one block. Then you get the silk mercers, the dealers in musliin, millinery & toys; and next the Norwich and Yorkshire manufacturers, mercery, lace, hose, fine made shoes, boots, clogs & pattens

A bit further down, on the left is where you'll find the oilmen & dealers in paints, pickles & preserves. One of these, Mr Green from Limehouse keeps a most important store here, I've heard how his returns a few years ago were from £1,500 to £2,000 during the fair. My father kept the fair for 40 years and upwards. He usually brought home £1,000 or more for goods brought and paid for, besides selling half as much again on credit to people he knew. Most of these traders are from London and occupy Garlic Row, which I've marked on the map. Few of them brought stocks of less than £1,500 or £2,000 in value. One Norwich man sold 100 pieces of Hessens before breakfast on the first day of the fair alone.

In other areas you have the cheese fair, the wool fair, the hops fair, and, as all this selling is thirsty work there's a drinking house called the Robin Hood. and because its hungry work as well you get suttling or eating booths where you can get plain well-cooked dinners at a moderate charge, though 6d extra is added to the tail of the goose on horse-fair day"

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Lightfoot continued his account of Stirbitch Fair. This was held in an open field bordering the high road from Cambridge to Newmarket, through which ran a cart track to Chesterton, which he described as a pretty rural village with a good church and a handsome spire, on the north bank of the river over which was a ferry.

"Now as well as what I've already told you there's a leather and glovers row, an ironmongers' row with dealers from Birmingham, Wolverhampton & Sheffield and twenty yards from them you get the woollen drapers. Nearby you find the coal, pottery and Staffordshire wares, the slop sellers, waggonners, jackets, hatters and so on.

"From what they say it was a cloth merchant from Kendal who was the starter of it all, hundred of years ago. He was trying to cross over the river and dropped his pack, soaking all his samples. So he spread them out on the grass to dry and soon found himself surrounded by scores of local people who bought up everything he had. So he came back next year, and brought his friends with him. And so its continued ever since.

"Nowadays much of its former glory has faded away, but there's still the horse fair which is unrivalled – except in Yorkshire from which come the finest hunters and races. You get the bony and muscular draught horses from Suffolk and from everywhere else that horses are bred. Crowds of the gentry and farmers come and compete for them and you'll see scores change hands in a very few hours.

"But you have to visit it for yourself to experience the whole atmosphere, the hawkers and the sellers, the hustle and the bustle – and the booksellers, like myself. You have to chivvy and encourage them" – and here Lightfoot treated Pickwick to some of his banter.

“Here’s an old author for you, Gentlemen, you may judge his antiquity by fashion of his leather jacket; herein is contain’d for the benefit of you scholars, the knowledge of every thing … for your encouragement, I’ll put him up at two shillings … advance three-pence … what nobody bid … fye for shame … he’s worth more to a powder-monkey to make cartridges of, than what’s bid … Well Sir, I must tell you you’ll find learning enough within him to puzzle both Universities; And sir, when you’ve read him seven years, if you don’t like him, bring him to me again … and I’ll help you to a man shall give you a shilling for him, to cover Band-boxes”

Now this was indeed an opportunity that Pickwick had never expected. To have become acquainted, nay even adopted by a travelling bookseller, and he with his own volume of “Papers” published not a year since. Perhaps this might be an opportunity to enhance his sales … but then again the ignominy of seeing his own work knocked down for far less than its true worth, or worse still not sold at all … No best to keep himself to himself for the time being.

“The oddest book I’ve ever heard of”, continued Lightfood, “was the one they found in Cambridge fish market on Peas Hill - that’s how it gets the name, from piscaria, the Latin for fish. It was back in the 1620s that a fish was sold which had been caught off Kings Lynn by a trawler man named Skinner. There was nothing unusual about it and he sent it with the others to Mr Brand’s stall. But when the fish was slit open they found a piece of sail-cloth inside it, and wrapped up in that cloth was a little book.

“Mr Prime the University bedell was passing at the time and heard the commotion so he went to have a look. He bought the book and took it to Dr Gostling of Caius college who had it cleaned and bound up by the University bookbinder so it was fit for the college library. For all I know it’s still there.

“The event was so unusual that next year they reprinted it and called it “Vox Piscis or the Book Fish’. In fact I’ve got a copy on the back of the waggon”.

Tucked amongst the other items in Pickwick’s uncollected luggage is a copy of the reprint, dated 1627 & illustrated with a frontispiece showing the fish with a book in its belly. The volume contains three treatises, ‘The preparation to the Crosse and to Death and the comfort under the Crosse & Death’, ‘The treasure of knowledge’ and ‘A Mirour or Glasse to know thyself’ written by John Frith ‘whiles hee was a prisoner in the Tower of London, A.D. MDXXXII’. There is little evidence that Pickwick actually read it, though doubtless he pondered just who had lost it in the first plaice!

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"Give it a few years and Stirbitch Fair won't be worth my coming to", confided Lightfoot, as his waggon load of books jolted ever nearer Cambridge. "The roads are getting better all the while, what with the Turnpikes, and with travel getting easier the wholesaler traders can meet at various places, they don't all have to get together just once a year. And once they stop coming than there'll be little takers for the books that 1 sell.

"When I was a lad the London hackney carriage owners would bring their vehicles up to Cambridge to take the crowds down the Newmarket Road, and the London wherry men would transport their boats overland because they'd be assured of large numbers of people visiting the fair by river. Now if they ever get round to finishing building that railway from London they keep talking about I reckon that will be the death knell for commercial fairs altogether.

"As it is they've reduced the length of this Stirbitch fair - it was always three weeks but since 1828 its been down to just fourteen days. You do still get the crowds of local folk but they come mainly to view the exhibitions of stuffed birds and animals, or see the panoramas or displays in the show booths.

"One of the main attraction used to be the players from the Norwich Company who always performed in a theatre on the fairground, but since Charles Humfrey built that theatre on Sun Street - the one Wilkins has now rebuilt - why that side of the fair has been killed right off. In fact you could say it was literally killed off in September 1802 - one day I shall never forget.

"I could usually rely on some sales after a play. They'd start with some grand historical drama - probably one like Julius Caesar written by Shakespeare - that they'd cut down a bit and brighten up with new dresses and decorations. After that you'd get somebody like Mr Saxoni, the celebrated rope dancer (better known by the name of the Little Devil) who'd perform some remarkable balancing feats; and then an light entertainment like 'The Deuce is in him'. By the end of the evening somebody would probably want a copy of the Shakespeare text. I'd always have a rare edition for the scholars, or one with some pages missing that I was selling off cheap - and the play had been so hacked about anyway most people would never notice!

"The theatre then was a wooden building built 14 years before just temporary, intended to last only seven years. They'd been some rumours about how it wanted repairing and was getting a bit the worse for wear. It was the night after the Horse Fair & wonderfully crowded in all parts, people in every seat, some clinging on to the beams and all.

"Immediately after the time of entrance by half price, there was a noise from one of the galleries. Some said it was like cracking walnuts, and others like the breaking of a board or starting of a plank. Everything went silent and all the eyes in the place, both those of the audience and the actors who were then dancing upon the stage, turned towards where the noise came from. Then dust issued down in a very inconsiderable quantity from the Gallery into one of the boxes in which sat Mr Haggerston junior & two ladies. At the same instant some person above the spot from which the noise proceeded in the gallery cried 'Fire' and instantly there were shrieks and cries of fire, murder, help - its impossible to describe for all thought the building was tumbling about their ears and on fire.

"Everybody in the upper areas tried to get down the stairs, but there were so many people the stairs collapsed, throwing numbers of people twirling and screaming down, tumbling upon those below. Others broke through the floor of the galleries and dropped down. The crush was so great that when people stumbled, or were knocked down by those, leaping from above, there was no chance of them getting to their feet again.

"A man upon one of the beams threw aside the pantiles that covered the roof and jumped down upon the land outside, 28 feet, unhurt and ran off but at least one boy was precipitated down and killed dead.

"Some of those in the front boxes - like Mr Elliott Smith & his party - jumped on the stage, forced open the stage door and crowded out that way. Mrs Wiles and a large party sat still in the middle of the pit during all the confusion, as did Mr Taylor & his wife - they escaped unhurt, but Mr & Mrs Eaden & their party believed the house was on fire and crawled for their life. Mr Eaden narrowly escaped a broken arm, it was very black and sore the next morning, and a young lady with them was taken home in strong fits. They were the lucky ones."

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As he listened to Lightfoot’s account of the tragedy unfolding in the theatrical booth at Stourbridge Fair in 1802, Pickwick could not help but shudder. These folk had gone out for an evening’s entertainment, for some it would be their last.

The details were heartbreaking: "Miss Mason, daughter of Henry Mason who kept the public house at Waterbeach was to be married to Jonathan Baxter of the same place the next week. He'd just taken a collar-maker's shop and a little farming business at Over, and was a steady, promising young man, and she a sober meek young woman, and I did hear never was at a play before. Baxter was not with her, but came next morning, poor fellow, to see the corpse, for she was killed outright. They supposed she was in the boxes and jumped into the pit and was trampled on and bruised internally as there were no marks of violence on her body anyone could see.

"Mrs Benstead of Walls Lane died in the theatre, as did a boy from Barnwell, a basket maker, killed on spot, and a little girl who crushed all her ribs on one side in and was sent to hospital with no hopes. Then there was Porter's maid in the same state.

"Mrs Willimott**,** poor woman! She was far advanced in pregnancy; she was in one of the green boxes near the stage and jumped down into the pit. The door was choked up with people and she could not have patience to wait so she attempted to jump over the iron-spiked fence which separated the pit from stage, so that she might get out that way. But in the attempt she fell and caught her arm upon one of the spikes which ran through her arm in and out, and she hung by it till she was obliged to be lifted off like a joint of meat in her own shop. She was all night in great pain, then she miscarried; next morning they say she was much swelled though hopes were entertained of her recovery – I never did hear the outcome. Mr Sharp in the neighbouring booth to me, told me he saw a gentleman's carriage early next morning taking away a lady - who he could not learn - who would not the night before be removed further, with her thighs broken and much otherwise bruised.

"Mr Murfitt of Trinity college shared nearly similar fate but got away with bad bruising, as did Mr Goode the barber in St John's Lane & his wife, both terribly bruised, laid aside in great pain and danger. Mr Papworth of Ditton, his wife and three children were in the gallery, and when the alarm took place he took care of the children and they got out safe, but his wife was beat down and could not get up. She was terribly trampled on and bruised and when they did carry her out was dangerously ill.

"But it was not just the rich folk who suffered. There was one woman in King's Lane, whose husband had been bad for a long time and they were beholden to the parish, but she truly must find her shilling for the play, and returned with a broken arm for her consolation. Some saw that as a warning to others, not to spent parish money on entertainment!

"Mrs Fordham's maid, the laundress, was terribly bruised. And another maid, Nancy, as well: like many more she was beat down and a great many people went over her; at last screaming 'Murder' two gentlemen, one hold of her arms, the other her legs, lifted her up & carried her out of theatre. She was bruised a good deal, but more frightened that hurt, and said she'd never go again – though when told that morning that the booth was dangerous she'd said that 'she did not care, if she broke her neck she would go to London'. There were others too, but perhaps the worst was what happened to Cook's daughter. He was a bricklayer up Castle End and didn't known she'd gone. When he heard about it he came down to the common and searched everywhere, to no avail. It was not until morning that her body was found underneath one of the seats in the playhouse.

"There were just so many injured that the poor bruised and wounded women were took into nearby houses. John Brown – he's a billiard house keeper, knows everything – he told me how he can just remember seeing the women lying on the floor as they were bought in, and the doctor, with his mother and servants, dressing their wounds and carrying them up to their warm beds – from which he had just been removed. Other's sat huddled by the fire, all wrapped in blankets; for the night was cold.

"All the while you could hear frantic screams reverberating through the darkness, striking consternation into every heart … despairing cries, some calling in vain for husbands, others for wives,

brothers for their sisters and sisters for their brothers; whilst little children crying for their parents were taken up and carried by charitable neighbours. And the worst of it was it was all done deliberately!

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Once the horror of the tragedy at the Stirbitch theatre in 1802 had sunk in people began to look for the cause of the fire – if indeed there had been a fire at all. Nobody could remember actually seeing flames, nor recall smelling smoke.
Stories circulated as to how the disaster had been caused by London pickpockets –somebody yelled out 'Fire' just to cause confusion, and one person on the stage was seen to put the lights out.

"The Box keeper himself, being in the crowd could not lift up his hands to his head because of the crush about him and had his hat stolen from his head. Vast quantities of hats, cloaks, gowns, shoes, watches and money were lost. I know for a fact that pockets were cut from people's sides and gowns ripped from their backs, shawls and shoes purloined and rings forcibly torn from lacerated and bleeding ears" reported Lightfoot

The manager of the Theatre, Mr Hindes put up a reward of a hundred guineas to anybody who could track down the miscreants, but nobody was ever caught for it. Needless to say this put a damper on the attendance at the Stourbridge Fair theatre for a while. But the crowds have come back now, and so have the thieves.

"Every fair time it's the same. Someone will lose their purses, or somebody will be robbed either on their way there, or more likely when they make their way home. One such incident took place last year. Elizabeth Cockerton from Soham went to the fair with her husband, While they were watching the jugglers she felt something in her pocket and saw this 17 year-old lad take his hand out of her pocket and put it in his own – then off he ran. Her husband gave chase and collared him – that little escapade earned him three months gaol with hard labour"

It may have been this remark that prompted Pickwick not to actually visit Stourbridge fair himself. He had already fallen pray to Cambridge swindlers and obviously had no wish to repeat the experience. It must, mused Pickwick, have been the worst such tragedy. But no for there had been a very similar instance 80 years earlier at Burwell, and of course the bookseller had amongst his stock a copy of that very rare pamphlet that described the incident. It was based on the reports of eye-witnesses and Pickwick had no choice but to purchase it.

It was a week in September 1727 and children in the villages of Reach & Upware, Swaffham Prior and Burwell were getting very excited. Their parents too were aware of a marvellous entertainment that would be acted out on the Friday night - a visit from Mr Shepheard and his puppets in the barn at Burwell.

Everybody was careful to save up the penny that would pay the admission charge and as the great night came the fens were alive with people making their way. John Blinkensop from Reach went along with Benjamin Collis, Rose Rooke & Thomas Leggitt from the same village. There too was the deaf and dumb boy they knew so well, Stephen Manning. John Prigg's daughter Mary travelled from Upware. Mary and Elizabeth Killingbeck were there from Swaffham Prior and strangers to the area also flocked in - strangers like Henry Rhoads, a customs officer from Derbyshire.

In amongst them all – over 140 people - was Thomas Howe aged 16 years. It was quite a queue before Thomas could pay his penny and get through the one narrow door. When inside

it was already quite packed, so the boy scrambled up to a beam just under the great thatch roof - and quite close to the old dead cobwebs that hung there. From there he could look down on the people he knew below - Lettuce Starling, Ann Bye, Sincere Warren.

But where were the daughters of the dissenting minister Thomas Royston who had so wanted to see the show - they were locked in their rooms at home –"Puppet shows are sinful, an offence against God; they trifle away time, contain profanity and impurity..." no the Minister's daughters were not going to be there.

Out at Exning a young man and his girl were just setting off when she was suddenly struck down with an attack of ague. They too missed the show – and lived.

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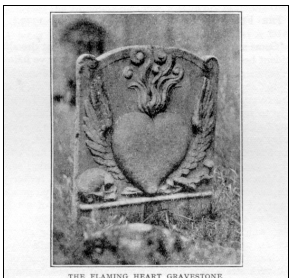
Pickwick was horrified as he read how Thomas Howe paid his penny and entered the great clunch barn at Burwell. Its walls were nine feet high but the thatch roof overhead towered up to over seventeen feet. The barn was nearly seventeen feet wide and in all it stretched over 45 feet in length - but only one third of it was available for the show; the rest was stacked with bundles of straw and at the far end was a stable where the puppeteers two horses were tethered

Inside the barn it was packed, Thomas Howe remembered it all – in fact he would never forget this night so long as he lived. "First there was the conjuring tricks they done on the oval table then they moved that out of the way and started the show proper - old Mr Sheppard acted the part of a lover and his wife the coy mistress - you should have seen how they jigged the puppets and how they danced; then they acted out St George and the Dragon".

Outside it was about 9 o'clock when Richard Whitaker the hostler came to feed the horses and discovered that the entertainment was well under way. He always worked in the barn - but tonight they would not let him in unless he paid his penny - but Richard knew a way. Taking his candle and lantern he went into the stable and climbed up to the top of the partition which divided the stable part from the rest of the barn. Pushing some of the hay aside he wriggled over the bundles of straw until he could look down from just under the great thatched roof on to the performance below.


THE FLAMING HEART GRAVESTONE
In memory of 82 persons who perished in a fire September 1727

"The dragon he was going at St George, blowing out fire and smoke ..."; meanwhile in the barn itself a small fire had in truth started - John Blinkensop, Rose Brooke and the others - even deaf and dumb Stephen Manning had less than half an hour to live

Thomas Howe sitting on the beam in the Burwell barn on Friday 8th September 1727 saw it all - he saw the fire when it was small enough to have been extinguished by his own hands; saw it before Richard Whitaker screamed out the alarm; such a small fire but it spread along the thatched roof like lightning.

"Everybody was thrown into terror. They were surrounded by straw, they rushed towards the door but that opened inwards and they'd put the table they used far the conjuring tricks against it - that was the only space left - the crush was so greet they could not open it. I heard old Shepheard the puppet man call out to his wife and say 'we shall certainly be burned'- that he was"

Outside people could see what was happening - already sparks from the thatched roof were spreading to surrounding buildings. Thomas Dobedee from Wicken was the first to appreciate the tragedy. He broke down the door and dragged as many as he could from the burning ruin. He dragged out one man whose metal-buttons on his knee breeches were melted by the fire.

Before he left his task the very hair on his head had been singed by the flames but out of the small hole he made 60 people scrambled or were pulled.

Thomas Howe was amongst them: “I sprung down from the beam and landed on the people lying upon one another to the depth of three or four feet - one had fallen down, then others fell on top of them - there was nobody near the door that was standing up.” Shortly afterwards the great thatched roof fell in - and the anguish, the cries, the shrieks of the suffers were ended in one universal silence and death.

"In the Morning that was a hideous scene - skulls, bones and carnage. The mangled relies was gathered up, shovelled into carts and buried in two a large pits dug in the churchyard”

Scarcely a family in the surrounding area escaped the tragedy - Thomas Howe’s own sister perished - not a single woman had survived; Parents bewailed the loss of their children, children mourned lost parents, sisters lost brothers, brothers sisters. Over 80 people died ... it made the Stourbridge theatre tragedy seem almost insignificant.

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Once finally safely back to his comfortable room in the Castle Hotel, quite near Parker’s Piece, Pickwick pondered his adventures of the previous days and, after a somewhat over-warm bath committed them to paper. It would be one thing to share them with his companions of the Pickwick Club but, with luck, he would find somebody to whom he could relate them in person. And so it proved.

Once he had enjoyed the welcome fare of the dining room he soon found himself in conversation with a very personable, young professional man; a solicitor from a nearby city with which he was totally unacquainted, but through the experiences of Andrew Percival Peterborough was brought to life

"When I went Peterborough in 1833 – five years ago now - it was to be articled to Mr Gates. We drove from Northampton where my father is a medical man with an extensive practice, so he could only spare one day. When you get to within a mile or two of Peterborough on any of the main roads you encounter a toll bar, there was another toll bar just over the bridge – nobody can get in or out of the town without paying contributions”

But surely these were nothing new – many road had turnpike gates, the payments helped to maintain the highway. “But these were not for maintaining the roads – they were to maintain the pavements – although of course residents do not have to pay it – it is just the visitor who has to stump up, except on Sundays”. Sundays would be free for all? “No on Sundays even the residents have to pay! Unless of course you live in the city and have your own carriage, gig or wagon – then you can walk as much as you want, for nothing. But if you can’t afford your own vehicle and have to hire one to take you out of town, then they charge you pavement tax as you leave”

“There are two main features of the city - the two large breweries - Squires & Buckles who perpetuate a tradition on each Easter Monday. Friends of the partners assemble and spend the afternoon playing marbles. I have myself spent pleasant afternoons there on Easter Mondays. They have two large tuns or barrels in which the beer is kept and a very hospitable time always follows the game at marbles"

By the sound of it the participants might have not always been too steady on the expensive walk home - but in Peterborough you could be carried. For the Sedan chairs still flourished, provided you could find men who were not too busy to be able to go when & where they were wanted.

Unlike Cambridge tramps were not welcomed in the city and the council appointed a Beadle whose principal duty was to see the tramps out of the town. He could not arrest them but had to ‘fidget &

them out'. "He is always chosen with special reference to his age and infirmity; he has a long robe, a mace and a cocked hat and looks very imposing"

Peterborough was a thriving commercial centre; the Cattle Market was an important asset and was held in the Long Causeway. On Saturday anybody who had cows or horses too sell brought them there and they took over the street. "But the ladies object - when going shopping they're unhappy at the prospect of meeting a restless looking cow or a doubtful looking ox, they say it takes away all notion of colour, shape and measure or whether the thing will wash or not". In consequence Long Causeway was practically abandoned on Market Day and not much more used on other days because in changeable or damp weather the atmosphere of the street was somewhat smelly.

They also had a Wednesday market on Market Place which, Percival confided "is one of the greatest curiosities you will ever see. I went there recently and saw an extraordinary medley of things exposed for sale - I thought at first they were to be given away, no-one on earth would want to buy them. It puts me in mind of a shop in the Market Place in Great Yarmouth where they say you may buy anything. A clergyman went in and asked 'do you happen to have a pulpit?' and they said, 'well it so happens we do!' And 1 think I've seen everything in Peterborough Wednesday Market except that - I have not seen anything so useful as a pulpit!"

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"I've seen odder things than a pulpit on the market at Whittlesey – that's up near Peterborough" chipped in another diner at the Castle Inn, his head swathed in bandages.

"I've got a little nephew live up that way, in the hamlet of Eldernell – four miles outside Whittlesey. I went up to visit him just the other week – which is why I'm nearly blind.

"My brother's one of those gentlemen farmers, very conscious of his place in society. He'll ride out to visit his distant farms after breakfast, return to a two o'clock dinner and take his ease until evening when he enjoys a social rubber of bridge. The ladies pay their visits to one another between noon and dinner; though when they visit Eldernell they put hideous calashes over their head-dress finery for the journey but on their arrival these are removed and they think themselves 'in full fig'. They're minor nobility rather than farmers – I've seen his wife run in terror from one of her own cows, and while they indulge in luxury their workers live in squalor and drink water from ditches.

"Such families must of course have servants – it's a tragedy if one leaves – so once a year they go off to the Statute or hiring fairs to get their farm and domestic staff. You see them from all around the fens, the farmer on his horse, the mistresses on the pillion behind him. When they get to the market place you'll see all the lines of men and women, some standing on bales of hay, shouting out what they're good at.

"The farmer's wife will walk along the line of women, looking for a cook, general maid of all work or dairymaid. You'll hear them discussing the conditions of service with as much indifferent to the activity around them as they can muster: 'What about my evening out Madam - some time off on Sundays and perhaps a holiday'

"While his wife is so engaged the farmer will be seeking amongst the hundreds of men who have travelled to market on this October day, leaving farms and villages deserted. They come either on foot in carriers carts or in their masters' vehicles. You soon see that the farm labourer is not such a fool as the townees often take him for. He might not be book-learned but he knows his business.

“Old Jerry the hedger knows how to trim and plash the quickset fences and interleave the young wood so as to present an impenetrable barrier to the stock, or fashion wicker-woven cribs. David who prides himself on the neatness and symmetry of his stacks which Jim the thatcher cansecure against the wind and rain – and save good grain from marauding rooks by paring the stacks with a long scythe-like knife. But old John is a man as would swing his flail in the barns day after day right through the winter, threshing out every grain before turning out the straw to the cattle in the stockyard for their food and bedding.

“There in the fairground wages will be negotiated – so many shillings a weeks with cottage and garden rented - then there's harvest money on top - wife to look after the poultry mind - and help in the dairy … So it is settled and the paper signed; but before parting you’ll hear a final negotiation between man and master:

“B’aint you going to give me an h-earnest maaster" says Giles. "Earnest. I thought those days had gone bye - I used to give them but when the yardman I hired send it back to me and said he wouldn't do the work - well I said to myself - no more earnests, if that is all they are worth”.

But Giles just rubs his chin and smiles: "Come maaster, yer not going to blame me for whar thar other country Johnnie did? I'm never so bad as that". So the farmer puts his hand into his pocket from which hangs an old-fashioned hob-chain; he draws out a florin and slips it into the man’s weather-stained hand; says “Now don’t you spend that siller in the public, but keep some of it. For may be you’ll want it when a pinch comes in the long winter days". "All-right. maaster" says Giles as he spits on the coin for luck, thrusts it into his pocket bids good day and sidles away to be lost in the fair. But come the due day he’ll be there ready to do his work, and the mistress will have her new servants – lots of strangers in the house to be knocked into shape by the old cook. There’ll be problems and perhaps tantrums, but work is short in those fens and few people will renege on their agreement.

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But there were even odder things than that to be seen around Whittlesey, continued their new companion, who now introduced himself as Joseph Little.

“Gypsies are a common sight with their picturesque wigwams – though they’re not welcome and people are concerned about the plight of their dogs. They use them for pulling carts and you’ll see this poor little dog panting like mad pulling a cart with a great hulking fellow riding on it.

“At Coates, nearby they have a collective herd of cows and donkeys and each morning a herdsman will collect them up and drive them to browse on the wide roadside verges or in Cow Lane and the green around the village is nibbled by flocks of geese.

“The whole of the fenland up that way is full of birdlife - flights of wild geese, buzzards, harriers and. bitterns and it was one of them that attacked me. We’d been out shooting and had a successful day, we’d bagged a lot of birds and then with my last shot I got a bittern. As I bent down to pick it up the dying bird struck at my eye with its massive bill – the doctors think I might get back my sight, but it will be a near thing.

“Next time I will stick to the decoys, where the worst you might get is being bitten by gnats – or the keeper’s dog. I’d gone a time or two before we were successful – you’d make that long trip through the fen to Skelton’s lonely farmhouse, a short distance from the decoy, only to be told the wind wasn’t right. In the end my brother turned officious and bullied the poor little man.

“So he gave us a piece of lighted turf and told us to breathe upon it, otherwise he said the ducks would be aware of our approach. Then he took us out into the fens and a long way round so we could enter the enclosure upwind. I’ll swear he led us the slubbiest way he could and every time I blundered into a marshy pool the water would soak my legs – but I dare not complain, indeed we were told we were not to speak under any circumstances.

“The decoy itself extends over several acres which have been left to run into a wilderness of alders, sedge and reeds. Right in the centre there’s a pond with a number of duck on it – they were sitting targets, but not for shooting. Amongst them were the decoys – tame ducks, specially trained to deceive the other birds into believing this was a good place to rest.

“Several ditches or pipes curve away from this pool, narrowing as they get further out – and the far end of the ditches are covered in nets. There are screens along the side of these ditches so the ducks can’t see us hiding behind them. But they’ve got little holes at the bottom, about a foot off the ground.

“Now old Skelton has got a little dog who jumps through one of the holes, and then comes back. This attracts the attention of the ducks – and they swim over to see what’s happening. Then the dog appears again a bit farther down – and the ducks follow. They repeat this exercise several times until the birds are well down the ditch, where its getting narrower, and covered by the nets.

“Then all of a sudden Skelton jumps out behind them – which gives the duck a right fright. They scramble and squawk and try to take off – but fly right into the nets and are trapped. You can take duck anytime between June and October and teal and widgeon between then and March. Skelton tells me that he regularly takes 200 dozen duck in seven days which he sends down to Leadenhall Market.

“But the main attraction of the area has to be the great expanse of Whittlesey Mere where you can go boating, bathing and bird watching. The great prize of the locality is the rare swallow-tail butterfly but you get every type of bird and even a few years ago now you could see a Shark and a Dolphin. And if you believe the tale there was an Alligator and Hippopotamus too. Now you can’t believe everything they tell you – but believe me it’s true!”

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Why on earth did everybody try and make a fool of him!

Pickwick could believe much about the odd folk who used to live on muddy islands in the fens, downing copious quantities of poppy-head tea – but this was ridiculous. They would be telling him next that all the women had yellow spotted bellies and the men had webbed feet – it was nonsense and he said so.

“Ah, but they do”, joined in another of the party gathered in the Castle Inn. “I am a doctor from Burwell and a friend of mine who spent a fortnight in Grunty Fen, near Ely and observed just such characteristics. I myself have known webbed fingers, webbed toes would not bother anybody!”

“And truly there was a shark, a dolphin and an alligator– and they were all pulled by a hippopotamus at Whittlesey in 1774”, chipped in Joseph Little. “I did not see them myself, but I know several that did, come refresh your glass and I will tell you the tale”.

And so he began to describe a fabulous voyage of a mini-fleet of boats, including that of the First Lord of the Admiralty, Lord John Montagu, fourth Earl of Sandwich, a controversial

figure, arrogant and unscrupulous who was nicknamed ‘Jemmy Twitcher’ after an unprincipled character in ‘The Beggar’s Opera’.

But the Captain of the fleet was George Walpole, third Earl of Orford, Lord Lieutenant of Norfolk, Lord of the Bedchamber and High Steward of King’s Lynn. Though some said that whilst he might command the fleet my day, by night he was subservient to Martha Turk, his long-term mistress. Others claimed he was rather more than eccentric, that he was an insatiable gambler and a member of the notorious “Hell-Fire Club”, which is where he’d met his friend Sandwich.

Come that as it may it was in July of 1774 he assembled at Lakenheath a motley group of sailing craft that he grandly named a ‘fleet’. It consisted of the ‘Whale’ which accommodated the female servants and the galley, the ‘Alligator’ and the ‘Shark’ which were fitted out with substantial cabins for sleeping (and whatever else the Captain chose), while the Dolphin provided living quarters for the crew. There were three other smaller craft intended for sailing matches and the ‘Fireaway’, designated a ‘bumketch’, the function of which Little would not speculate upon, though a bomb-ketch in naval parlance was a vessel designed for shore bombardment. Perhaps it might have been a gun-punt, armed with one of the massive shotguns such as that used by William Merry to bring down dozens of birds at a single shot.

That left the Hippotamus, who lived on The Cocoa Nut but spent much of its time on the bank – for this was the horse whose role it was to tow the craft when the wind would not suffice.

The grand departure from Lakenheath was a fiasco for the fen wind failed and no boat could move. One by one Hippopotamus hauled them away from the town and out towards the open River Ouse at Brandon Creek and on to the start proper of their voyage of discovery – one that would surely rival the great explorations of that other great captain of the era, James Cook.

Their voyage towards the great sluice at Denver was largely uneventful, as – fortunately - was the passage through that most treacherous of structures. They were able to admire the engineering ingenuity of the sluice which had been built to protect the navigation of Cambridge, but which had failed dramatically in 1713, causing widespread flooding & only been rebuilt less than 25 years earlier. At the arrival at Salter’s Lode the fleet reassembled and the wind was fair – but the tides were against them, as was a particularly obnoxious bargee who refused to move away for their benefit, so the first night of the expedition was spent strung out along the river bank. Out went the fishing nets and from the floating weed and mud of the river came fourteen small perch. A watch was set, and watches were set and at five o’clock on a Sunday morning the armada passed into a land where the churches were large and well built, but the natives meanly clad and dirty. On they journeyed to Whoresnest Ferry, a fitting place for the captain, his lady and crew, to spend the night.

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In July 1774 fen folk from all around the March area flocked to the riverside to see a sight they might never see again; there in their midst were not only a shark and a dolphin, but an alligator and hippopotamus too. But all they saw was a motley collection of boats full of high-born nobility and while they ogled their betters, their betters commented upon the ugliness of the onlookers.

Lord Orford’s grand fleet made its stately way through overgrown waterways en route to the great metropolis of Upwell when a halt was made to take on supplies of milk from a farmer named Rate, whose own preferment was for Ringwood beer, which he commended much and drank to the last drop. This fine citizen was a brisk man of 42 years of age; he had been twice

married and had four children by his last wife, who had four children by her first husband. Both seemed to enjoy a good state of heath, though racked with ague, the reigning disorder in such places.

Yet any feeling that the ugly natives might be friendly was overturned as they voyaged on towards March when suddenly there appeared on the bank a fen man who demanded fourpence toll to allow hippopotamus to continue along the river bank. Without the horse's power there could be no passage, the wind being contrary. No payment, no passage was the threat, and who knew what motley army might be hiding behind the high river banks. But the Earl of Orford, Lord Lieutenant of Norfolk was not inclined to pay & not one to be threatened, especially once his fearless crew had caught up with them. Away went the fenman, swearing heartily and threatening retribution. From now on the intrepid voyagers would need to be on their guard.

They passed on, through March town with its good houses and gardens running down to the waterside. They arrived at Flood's Ferry early next morning and set course for their destination, towards Whittlesey.

Soon however they found their way blocked by a more significant obstruction than a mere mortal. The bridge that crossed the river was just too low to allow the ships passage, but there was no room to turn and to retreat would be inconceivable. There was just one answer. What man could build, men could demolish – no Lordly progress could be interrupted by a peasant's bridge. Out swarmed the carpenters, down came the bridge. It was a process that would be repeated time and again, sometimes jacking up the structure to allow them passage – but always they passed, and always they left the bridge intact again – or so they claimed, and who would dispute the word of a gentleman and his friends.

Finally they arrived at their destination, that great and undiscovered inland ocean, the four mile long and three mile broad expanse of Whittlesey mere, its shining waters some five to seven feet deep. It was here they would fish, here they would fowl, here they would race in their myriad craft and here the Lord and his lady-friend would entertain their guests, and themselves.

But they reckoned without the force of nature. For their ocean was not sheltered by rising cliffs, there was only the reedy shore between them and the firmer ground (if indeed there was any firmer ground to be found in those parts). The fenland winds, even in mid-summer were strong enough to raise waves which tossed their craft around, whilst on more than one occasion members of the party found themselves being driven towards the bank, and had to struggle to return back to the fleet. To make matters worse the bumketch broke from its moorings and had to be chased and brought back by the Swallow.

The toll-keeper's curses were all but forgotten, until on the ninth day of the expedition the fleet found itself surrounded by a number of boats, filled by the curious from neighbouring villages. The inhabitants stood with folded arms and expressionless faces. But did they come in peace or war. Sailors were sent out to parley and barter and soon the native faces broke into smiles, and soon the bartering turned to kissing, and many a fen-girls riband ended in a sailor's cap to her great delight. As that day ended there was an expression on several fen-girl's faces similar to the one which normally belonged on that of Mrs Turk, the Captain's mistress.

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The Earl of Orford and his fleet had continued in the summer of 1774 to explore the open sea of Whittlesey mere; and in the best traditions of explorers they named each new discovery –

Magpie Fields after the large number of those birds in the locality, Turk's Island after the Earl's lady.

But one could not expect such a lady to spend all her time in the company of coarse sailors, so a shore excursion was arranged to Spalding races. They rode through open fields producing great crops of beans, wheat, barley, hay and corn. Through this land of plenty they continued to Market Deeping where they sought fresh horses – but were unable to find them. So here they took an enforced rest before continuing onto a common covered with thistles, cattle, sheep and bloody geese. For the inhuman custom of plucking the geese for their down had just been put into execution, numerous dead and dying birds, their feathers covered in blood, lay alongside the road. The lady averted her gaze.

Nor was there much else to see in this dreary countryside, save wretched farm houses and a miserable tavern, until the ruins of Crowland Abbey added to the melancholy prospect. As they neared Spalding the scene changed to one of flooded fields, the cattle feeding up to their bellies in water. But at least the town was dry, with good shops to divert the time until the races were due to start. Then Martha Turk could feast her eyes on the farmers' wives and daughters, dressed in their finery, and her male companions could note how much more handsome these ladies were than those of the fenland. Not so the men for one they observed had large warts around his eyelids, much resembling a carrier pigeon

Once the races were run it was time for return back to Peterborough, still with the same pair of horses with which they had started their forty-mile journey. It was late before the racing party could rejoin the fleet and straggle, much bedraggled, to their beds.

Mrs Turk excused herself from other expeditions Benwick and Ramsey. This latter they found strung out along the banks of the river over which had been erected three bridges, two of wood and one of stone; the houses were regularly placed, the old abbey church ruined and the natives remarkable for their long teeth and straight lank hair. From there they journeyed overland to Huntingdon with another fine bridge but a monastically gloomy church of heavy architecture.

Though the threatened attacks by savage natives had so far failed to materialise, a raid by bargemen on the Cocoa-nut, their supply vessel, stole several salted jacks. The crew fished the waters of the mere with trimmers – stakes set out about twenty yards from each other to which was tied a line about ten yards long, with a float. On the hook was a live bait; part of the line was wound round a crooked stick, which unwound when the fish is taken. But although they caught the bait, they had little success with larger fish, the eels eating those they did catch.

Then just as things were looking bleak there came a new sail in the distance and all eyes turned that way. There hove into view the craft of the First Lord of the Admiralty himself, John Montagu, and the Earl of Sandwich brought sustenance – not bread, but fishes. For the Admiral's men knew better just where to set the lines. That night the waters rang with song as Sandwich performed his party-piece, a rapidly-sung version of 'The Barley Mow', and nature herself joined in with a violent storm of lightning and rain ensuring a very disturbed night for all concerned.

And so the expedition continued, till lit was time to set sail for home. Once more it was the turn of Hippopotamus to earn his keep, towing boats that became becalmed. With a close watch for the threatening tollkeeper, and more work by the company's carpenters, raising and removing the bridges that blocked their passage, they arrived back at the junction with the Ouse. But here they were trapped, for a line of lighters had become grounded by the falling tide and were blocking the river. Lord Orford became furious at such delay and promptly sacked the master waterman who had navigated throughout the voyage blaming him for not

personally intervening to remove the barges. Somehow without his expertise the crew finally returned to Lakenheath, their 22-day expedition into the wilds of the fen completed, an epic voyage truly to be retold in London clubs and fenland taverns.

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While listening to his companion's account of the voyage on Whittlesey Mere Pickwick had recognised several of the names of the places referred to. For a while he could not remember why. Then he did.

For just the previous year, in May 1837, he had found himself trapped in a crowd of people at Newgate in London. There had been hundred and hundreds of them – some said as many as two thousand, many spending the night sleeping in the open on the steps of the church of the prison, others in the doorways of shops, or in St Sepulchre's church. Some had actually spent the hours of darkness clinging to lampposts to ensure a good view. As day dawned every window in the vicinity was packed but then came the rumours. The action would be taking place at Horsemonger Lane – and part of the multitude made their way there. One had been acquitted, perhaps there would be no spectacle at all.

But then the doors of the prison had opened and workmen appeared carrying boards. The clinking of hammers, the ringing of the chains and the concussion of the boards as one after the other they were incorporated into a platform were the signal for an irruption of more hundreds and thousands from every part of the metropolis.

As the morning advanced the multitude amongst which Pickwick was numbered became consolidated into one great aggregate, though which neither coaches, cabs nor any kind of vehicle could make their way but with difficulty. The police and constables began to fix blocks and bars at the termination of the different avenues, to prevent such a fatal accumulation of numbers as had occurred at a previous performance, when not less than thirty individuals had been crushed to death. Still the pressure on many points was irresistible and creams and groans from persons who could not extricate themselves were mingled in horrible discordance with the barbarous pleasantries of the surrounding body.

By the time it was six o'clock nobody could have been in any doubt about what was afoot, for the machinery of death was conspicuous from a great distance. The height of the horizontal beam of the gallows from the base of the platform on which it was erected was about twenty feet. Those who could not approach nearer were glad even to view it from Ludgate Hill. The roofs of the houses were now crowded with spectators.

Another hour had dragged by. Then about half-past-seven the sheriff's carriage arrived, preceded by a body of constables. Those gentlemen who produced cards were admitted to the prison, through the Sessions House. The rest could only stand and watch. They had not long to wait.

At sixteen minutes to eight a door opened and the executioner appeared to make one final check over the machinery he was to operate. The minutes now slowly and awfully lessened.

As the bell tolled the hour of death Dr Cotton appeared, reading the prayers for the dead. Behind was the prisoner, his lips quivering as if vainly trying to articulate the responses, and one of them officers was obliged to support him, or he would have fallen. He neither turned to the right or left and his eyes were closed as he walked along the narrow passage which lead from his cell to the platform.

On his arrival he had been greeted with a storm of terrific yells and hisses, mingled with groans, cheers and other expressions of reproach, revenge and hatred. He said not one word of hope, repentance or reconcilement, to the disappointment of the multitude, who now strained for any utterance. As the condemned man cast a final look of contempt at the crowd – a look which Pickwick had seemed to feel was directed expressly at him – he had faintly uttered one last sentence, "Don't leave me long in the

concourse". Scarcely had the last syllable fell, than the signal was given, the spring was touched and at ten minutes past eight he had ceased to breath.

Once the excitement was over those at the front sought to make their way home, only to find their way blocked by others from the back now anxious for a closer view and several were crushed in the crowd. The general opinion had been that it was a disappointing spectacle. Pickwick had heard various snatches of conversation, and surely the word 'Whittlesey' had been prominent. Perhaps now he could learn the full details of the case.

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Pickwick listened fascinated as the details emerged of a murder that had taken place at Denver just 18 months before.

Three men had been working on the railroad near Berkhampstead and one, Day, who called himself Smith, related how he had been detained by sickness in Downham Market for some four months. During that time he had heard of a rich woman, named Hannah Manfield, whose vanity induced her to make public show of her money and the articles of plate she possessed. As soon as he recovered Smith and an accomplice planned a robbery, but it had never taken place. Now he would try again.

On Boxing Day 1836 he and his two new companions set forth for Norfolk, their journey funded by crime, for Smith had noticed the man with whom they lodged receive rent from some cottages. They took the opportunity to pick the lock of the drawer in which the money was secreted and decamped with some £8, some articles of silver, and a watch. The three made their way to London and disposed of the plate, keeping the watch, which they were later to sell in Whittlesey.

Before the trio reached Cambridge one of the party, Timms, dreamed that a woman appeared standing at the foot of his bed; he saw this as an omen that something horrible was to happen. He persuaded the third man, Varnham, to abandon the idea and Smith declared he would 'do the job' by himself. But by ill-fortune the three met up again and agreed to proceed.

When they arrived at Littleport Varnham loitered at the public house and his companions went on alone. But then his resolve returned and he caught up with them. By the time they finally arrived at Denver the journey had taken rather more than a week, during the whole of which period they were in a state of intoxication.

On the 1st January 1837 they made their way to Denver churchyard, passing the woman's cottage on the way without realising it. Now Smith had to get his bearings, they retraced their steps and rested on a stile within site of the victim's house, where they bolstered their courage with a bottle of rum. When the desperadoes saw movement near the house, two of them had more doubts about their mission, though Smith persuaded them that they had now come too far to give up. They sat until all was quiet then proceeded across the common to the cottage. They fastened the door of an adjoining farmhouse by tying it to two hedge-stakes laid across the door posts.

It was about half-past one o'clock when they attempted to break in at the woman's window. But Mrs Manfield was a light sleeper and called out. 'Me and my wife have lost our way', called out Timms, 'please come down and tell us where we should go'. Hannah would have none of it, she screamed out for help, but if her neighbours did hear they could not come out to her aid. The robbers now broke down her door and whilst one gripped her by the throat the others started to plunder the house. Still the gallant old woman struggled until she was finally silenced with a kitchen knife.

At this the men panicked; they abandoned the search, dropped some of the money and left pieces of plate as they dashed, splattered with blood, back to the churchyard, leaving gory footprints in the snow. But now they were disorientated, all roads seemed the same under their white covering. Their fate was

sealed when they blundered upon a chimney sweep and his boy – three bloody men emerging red-faced from the darkness was something not to be forgotten.

They blundered through the night until they found themselves on the other side of Wisbech. Such was their confusion that some few days later they were cutting their food with the very knife that had murdered Hannah Manfield. What few pounds they had stolen went on liquor. Their freedom was short lived.

600 people packed into the little church at Bexwell, near Downham Market, to hear the parson preach on the wretched culprits; many more saw them meet their just fate on the gallows.

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"Whittlesey?" boomed the voice of a weather-beaten, obviously well-heeled, and well-educated elderly gentleman who had appeared to be slumbering in an armchair, but was now fully alert. "I never went to Whittlesey Mere, nor do I know anything of the sport it affords, except from hearsay; and as I never retail aught but *quorum pars fui, quaeque ipse vidi,* all that has come to my knowledge of this far-famed resort of the pupils of Colonel Hawker in the art of wildfowl shooting, is contained in a simple ballad, commencing 'Did you ever hear of a fat Auctioneer' – damn'd if I can remember the rest but it ends up 'So he goes twice a year to Whittlesey Mere'.

"No I'm a hunting man myself. Many a morning have I passed in the inspection of the various livery stables in Cambridge; and not only is it an agreeable lounge, but much information is to be acquired by the examination of so many and such good horses as are always to be found there. In nothing do we surpass our Oxford friends as in the excellence of our hacks.

"In my day Jordan's and Baxter's stalls were full of horses, scarcely one of which was to be had under 'three figures'; and of course such valuable nags were not hawked about for the sake of the two guineas of every fool who met the Gransdens at Two Pot House.

"But Jordan knew his men pretty well whom he could trust – he used to hunt a good deal himself, and his son was a very hard rider. I remember, with Sir George Leeds' hounds, seeing a youth larking, and asked Jordan (who was near me) if he knew who it was. Ben's reply was particularly laconic: 'I ought – I got him!'

"In my opinion, however, Baxter beat him in hunting condition; as Jordan's horses were generally too high in flesh, and more fit for sale than for hiring. Browning, at Barnwell, also had some very valuable horses, as I can say from my experience. I have now in my stable one which came from his yard who is now nineteen years old – and who carries me dozens of times in a season.

"The other stables – except those of the two Rawlins', who had a capital screw or two - were chiefly filled with light-carcassed, half-bred, quick-going hackneys, upon which you'd see aspirant Senior Ops' and embryo Wranglers, black-gaitered, seedy and unkempt, taking the air for one hour at the very best pace along the Trumpington Road – having diligently searched for and secured the roughest trotter upon which Euclid and Commons might be most effectually digested.

"As such excellent hunters were to be hired, it is not to be wondered at that our sporting men had not such large studs as are kept at Oxford; indeed I recollect but few men who went farther than to fill a three-stall, and two hunters was the general allowance. It is, moreover, no less strange than true, that the setters of the field were generally mounted from livery stables.

"During the first part of my residence at the University, by far the best rider and sportsman of the day was John Bower – proof if you need it that weight does not stop a man in hunting – and Mr White, Lord Bantry's second son, was quite a front-rank man, and on an extraordinary old Irish mare with a

‘peacock’ tail, saw as much of the hounds as any man in the field, and often used to take, aye and keep the lead, sorely against the will of many of us.

“The Scarlet Club turned out some very good men, chiefly from Eton – it far excelled in the splendour of its entertainments, any other club in Cambridge. Their evening dress – a scarlet coat, white waistcoat and breeches – gave an air of peculiar gaiety to a room, and the Hoop was at their meetings the scene of infinite jollity and good company. The Beef Steak, the Yorkshire, the True Blue, the Eton and the Westminster were the other chief Clubs. The ‘Owls’, whose great merit was never to go to bed till day-light - was the invention of some worthies after my time, together with several other ‘Smoakeys’ which I trust are knocked up long ere now, as they by no means tend to support or improve the reputation of a gentleman, to which the best set of Cambridge men have so good a title”.

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“I still turn out with the hounds when I can”, continued the well-bred but now obviously somewhat less agile gentlemen. “Why the other November I took a capital run with Mr Mure’s hounds at Brinkley Wood. The moment the hounds were thrown in they found a gallant old fox who broke cover with a brush the end of which was as white as snow; directly after a cub broke in the same direction, and was followed by four couple and a half of hounds. After a fine race the cub saved his life by the length of his brush, and ran to ground under the Malting.

“The body of hounds took after the ‘old-un’ and went away at a rattling pace for Six-Mile-Bottom Gorse but before he got there he was headed, turned to the left, left the London Road on the right about a mile till he got near Balsham. Instead, however of going to Balsham Wood, as we expected, he turned to the right to Kilmersham Gorse, from thence he went to Babraham Thorns. He ran in view four fields, and as soon as the hounds appeared in one field the fox entered the next. ‘All safe’, was the cry, ‘sure to kill’. We surrounded him as we supposed, but it was no go, he was off, and the gallant old fellow saved himself for another day.

“Then a view hallo was given three miles off, towards Burton Great Wood, near Walden. The pace was awful, and the horses terribly beaten; indeed the second whip’s died on the limekilns. But a better run has not been seen in this county for years – it was 15 miles as the crow flies, but the way the hounds went at least 20. Including four momentary checks, the time was only an hour and twenty minute. Afterwards a large party of us assembled at Newmarket, and drank success to Mr Mure and his hounds”

George Mure hailed from Herringswell, explained another of the party. He had succeeded as Master of the Thurlow Hounds in 1827 at a time when hunting was in a low ebb. Earlier Mr Osbaldeston had brought his beautiful pack from Leicestershire to hunt in 1822 but had remained for only one season, being much disgusted with the poor show of foxes. A few years earlier Sir Charles Watson had a very good pack of harriers who in December 1817 had found a fox in a covet called Lord Orford’s Folly (doubtless named after the intrepid explorer about whom Pickwick had already heard so much). The fox headed for Kentford, ran through the village and was killed several miles away on the far side, after a brilliant hunt of three-quarters of an hour. Then they had tried for a hare – which gave them another good hunt for over an hour, before the afternoon turned out very wet and hunting ceased, so the hunt, some 200 in number, repaired to the Rutland Arms to celebrate a great day’s sport there.

Of course not everybody approved of hunting – there was the story of one of the Dukes of Grafton and a Quaker from Newmarket who stood on a hill waving his hat and hallowing so lustily that he put the pack of the line of their fox. His Grace, much enraged, galloped up to the intruder and inquired in a very angry tone: “Art thou a Quaker?” “I am, friend” replied the man. “Well then”, rejoined the Duke, “as you never pull off your hat to a Christian, I will thank you in future not to pay that compliment to a fox”

“Newmarket – that’s the home for two great sports”, joined in another diner at the Castle Inn. “Hunting’s one but the greatest - and the one that Newmarket folk are the best breeders in the world at - is cockfighting. They get their birds properly trained and a thoroughly trained game cock will fight to the death – I’ve been to many a match at the cockpit at Chatteris. Back in 1823 a Newmarket gentleman, of the first respectability, issued a challenge, that he would fight a main of cocks, of three double day’s play, against any gentleman in England. Each would show 41 cocks for give guineas a battle and one hundred guineas the odd.” The newcomer would have gone on in great detail, but Pickwick had already heard enough about blood sports and changed the subject – though not before he had learned something of the life of John Green who had been born at Newmarket but then moved to King’s Lynn where he became boots at the Duke’s Head hotel. It was not a position he held for long, for he was sacked and became that town’s shoe black. He had married a woman of the town, but became bored with her and sold her with a halter round her neck for a gallon of beer. Then he went back to his true love, cock-fighting.

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It was one thing to indulge in the inhumane practice of cock-fighting – indeed it was rumoured that amongst its adherents were ‘highly graduated members of the University of Cambridge’, but for John Green of King’s Lynn to have sold his wife for a gallon of beer – that was surely impossible!

But not so – for several of those gathered in the bar of the Castle Inn had their own accounts of the practice, which it appeared was not limited to Cambridgeshire.

“I heard tell of how a miller from Wiggenhall St Germans sold his wife to a blacksmith, and all he got for her was a single shilling”, started one. “That’s far too cheap, why I heard how the going rate was more than that in Oxford back in 1789. Richard Hawkins, one of the canal navigation men made a public sale of his wife in the market place there – and he found a buyer in William Gibbs who was employed in the works at the Castle. They stood there haggling about the price; Hawkins wanted five shilling, but Gibbs couldn’t afford all that, so they compromised. Three bob changed hands and the husband tied a penny slip round his wife’s wrist, then put it in the man’s hand and took his leave. The woman immediately called for a second wedding ring, which being put on she eagerly kissed the fellow with whom she walked off. As far as I know they lived happy ever after”.

“He got a bargain there”, chipped in a third. I was up in Derbyshire and heard the tale of a weaver in Chesterfield – mind you I’m going back 50 year now. He was anxious to get rid of his wife, and she was as equally willing to leave, so it was decided to sell her – well he thought as how he’d get rid of a nagging woman and make some money in the process. They found a purchaser and got a writing drawn up whereby the husband agreed to resign all rights and present pretensions to his wife whatever. But to make the transaction more firm and valid she was took to the public market place with a halter round her neck, and there the deed was done. The loving couple marched away arm in arm together, the man seeming much pleased with his deal and the husband more delighted he had got rid of the plague of his life and received a handsome gratuity into the bargain. How much did he get? Fifteen guineas!”

“That’s all very well, but you don’t know what you’re getting. She might look sweet and inoffensive, but you heard about what happened to Annie Izzard out at Great Paxton. She seemed a very harmless old woman, nearly sixty years of age and the mother of eight children. Then one night she was sleeping with her husband when the door was broken down and she was dragged out of bed by three man and forced into the yard without any clothes on. There she was set upon by a group of women who stuck pins in her head, arms, legs and other parts of her body till they were literally covered with blood. Then the next night it happened again.

“It seems the poor villagers, and some of the farmers, believed she was a witch and had afflicted the women who attacked her with grievous fits. They said how she overturned a cart drawn by three horses and loaded with corn, then she carried five bushels of wheat upon her back from St Neots to Great

Paxton with as much care as if they had weighed five pounds. She could make herself invisible, travel from place to place through the air in an instant and gave suck to several imps. And the problem with imps is that she had to make mischief for them to do or they were a great torment to her – she kept them under her armpits or in her bosom – took them to church with her! She'd sent them imps out to spy on people in the village – one woman spotted one in her kitchen … The local people really thought they could take revenge by ducking her, or assaulting her as they thought fit!"

This surely, interjected Pickwick, must have taken place some hundreds of years ago. But no, asserted his informant. "I'm just 48 now and I remember it happening when I was a lad of about eighteen year old, so that's not so far back.

"No doubt about it – if you want a wife the best thing to do is what old Contento did – advertise for one in the paper!", suggested another voice, which brought the room to a shocked silence.
Ch 21st May1808 & stories from Folklore Chronicle

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To advertise in the paper for a wife? Surely not. But a newspaper of the 1830s contained a wide variety of advertising, indeed it constituted a major source of its income. Amongst the material which Pickwick left behind when he departed is a copy of the Cambridge Chronicle for 29th September 1838, and advertisements and public notices, fill its pages.

In that week paragraphs proclaimed the setting out of the several public footways in the parish of Swavesey, including one from the north end of Little London Lane, proceeding in a northward direction over Hall Leys and Gospel Hill to the Mow Fen Bridge and thence across that fen to Fen Drayton. The community was obviously in the throws of change – as James Bowd had told him.

There was property to be had by auction at Soham including the messuage or dwelling house in Hall Street, formerly home to Mr Sizer Fyson, together with the adjacent shop occupied by Edward Peachey, grocer, while Jonas Clark of Meer Farm was disposing of his live and dead stock. There were 400 pure southdown ewes and lambs to be bought at Wood Hall, Arkesden, or a genteel and commodious family residence on Hogs Green, Saffron Walden. For those seeking a n opportunity in the licensed trade a first rate inn, the Star in Newmarket. High Street with stabling for 26 horses was available for purchase, as was the White Hart commercial inn at the Sheepmarket, St Ives with 12 good bedrooms, a dining room for some 60 people & stabling for 50 horses. With such a bustling centre and so many stagecoaches passing through the town this indeed might be a worthwhile investment – unless the railways came, for then, as he had already heard, the trade might collapse overnight.

One item that seems to have caught Pickwick's eye, for it is circled, is the proclamation that the London and Birmingham railway was now open along its entire route. Passengers and parcels, private carriages and horses could now be transported – at a price. The fare for a first-class carriage, carrying six inside passengers was 30/- by the day train, 2/6 more for the night and arrangements were being put in place with the various stagecoach companies to establish connections to neighbouring towns. Perhaps he would use it for his next exploration, ready to report to members of his Pickwick Club at their meetings in the George and Vulture, off Lombard Street.

"Wanted" notices were carried on the second page: one young man of respectability with an undeniable character was seeking a position in a chandler or grocer's shop – and he was less concerned with a salary, more concerned to have a comfortable position. Another 28-year-old was seeking a situation of coachman, or to take charge of saddle horses – reply care of William Hills the hairdresser in Pembroke Street. Others were seeking to fill vacancies, a Great Yarmouth chemist wanted an apprentice, whilst anybody already qualified might find a position with Christopher Buckle of Peterborough who was about to commence business in that line in Narrow Street, Peterborough.

But nowhere was there anything resembling the plea that had been made in January 1829 – of which a folded cutting remains as proof. “Matrimony”, it was headed, and continues: “Any single lady who is of a respectable family & has received a good education, who is not too young, too handsome, nor too rich, & not the contrary of the abovesaid qualifications, may (if desirous for a good husband), hear of one by addressing a letter, post paid, to Mr Sembre Contento, Post Office, Cambridge, stating any hour by day, and any public place in Cambridge, for a meeting with the lady herself, by describing her dress etc. The greatest secrecy will be kept on his part, & is also kindly requested from the lady, in case of a nonsuit.

‘N.B. to prevent mistakes, which may be occasioned by miscarriage of letters or disappointment in meeting, another letter will be required from the lady; also it may be necessary to state that the Advertiser, is a middle-aged man, middle size and fair complexion, a Foreigner, speaks five different languages, travelled several times all over Europe, both by sea and by land, and holds at present a respectable situation, worth £300 a year’.

Did he succeed in his quest, Pickwick wondered or – in a town like Cambridge with so many young ladies of dubious virtue – had he been tricked of his money. The very thought brought back unpleasant memories of his own treatment in the Wrestlers’ Inn, was it only days ago?

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Conversation amongst the well-dined at the Castle Inn paused, then resumed at full flow, the sport of wife-hunting being replaced by altogether more manly pursuits.

“To be true the most shooting you get round Cambridge these days is decided and unequivocal poaching”, a new voice joined in. “The Trumpington and Ditton manors are most infested by these unlicensed deprecators, who generally have no other qualification that that furnished by a gun, a pointer, and a light pair of heels upon the appearance of a keeper. Nor are Bottisham, and the well-stocked turnip fields of the worthy Master of Downing at Quy exempt from an occasional visit.

“Madingley is pretty safe from poaching since they always have a watch set, and of course most of the gentry are well acquainted with its owner and honour bound not to trespass. But not so long ago, when I was an undergraduate, Cambridge offered some of the best shooting in the area. In going over the land now occupied by Downing Terrace you generally got five or six shots at snipe. Crossing the Leys you entered on Cow Fen and this abounded with snipes. Walking through the osier bed on the Trumpington side of the brook you frequently met with a partridge and now and then a pheasant. From thence to the lower end of Pemberton’s garden was one continued marsh, which afforded plenty of snipes, and in the month of March a hare or two.

“If you chose to keep on by the side of the river you came to Harston, well known to sportsmen; and at no great distance from this you arrived at Foulmire Mere, which produced a great variety of wildfowl. Then we would come back by the coach than used to change horses at the Swan and be at the Blue Boar anytime between seven and eight o’clock.

“If you started from the other side of Parker’s Piece you’d get to Cherry Hinton fen, and then on to Teversham, Quy, Bottisham and Swaffham fens. In taking this beat you met with great varieties of wildfowl, bitterns, plovers of every description, ruffs and reeves and not infrequently pheasants. If you did not go very near the mansions of the few country gentlemen who resided in the neighbourhood, you met with no interruption. You scarcely ever saw the gamekeeper, but you would meet with a great number of young lads, who were on the lookout for sportsmen from the University, whose game they carried. These lads always carried long poles with them, to help jump wide ditches that run through the fens in all directions”.

“I was never one for shooting, myself”, joined in a muscular man, still fit despite advancing years. “I preferred fencing. “My friend Harry Angelo’s room was a great attraction when I was at University

fifteen years ago. He had some excellent fencers in his school in those days – Morris, Crole, Scarlett and half-dozen more generally had a match with either foils or sticks, and were all very good swordsmen. But Angelo himself – why his grace, his strength, his hand and eye, his rapidity, his steadiness –you cannot imagine too brilliant an idea of this phoenix of modern gladiators. I was pleased to see Angelo was still here the last time I visited, still teaching both fencing and broadsword in the large room at the Black Bear inn in Market Street".

"Fencing – you should've tried sparring", butted in a pugnacious fellow. "Old Bill Eales would give you a rehearsal which would put you in practice on any evening you chose. But if you took a stroll over Market Hill after dark almost any evening any undergraduate with more wine than wisdom in their heads would be sure to find some townsmen willing to indulge in a little fisticuffs. I remember one evening I was sure a 'row' was on foot. Parties of five or six, both 'town' and 'gown' were parading abreast, with that peculiar and not-to-be-mistaken air which provokes a fight, each in the hope of the opposite party commencing aggravation.

"Down which-ever street you cast your eye fresh detachments were pouring towards the Market Place, which both parties always regarded as the 'trysting place' . I of course hooked on to a line of my friends who were bound thither and on our arrival was all ripe for riot. Shop shutters were closed – heads peeped out of upper windows for a moment – feet shuffled thicker and thicker along the muddy pavement. 'Cavaliers and 'Roundheads' eyed each other up as if measuring the strength of their future opponents. Everything was ready for the fray."

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"So there we all were on the Market Hill, prepared for war", continued the one-time undergraduate, "and there were the Proctors and Bull-dogs, Deans, Tutors and Big-wigs, all in motion and 'name and college' instantly demanded of any one who showed any symptom of disorderly conduct.

"Presently lights were exhibited in the Safety coach office, which were immediately saluted with a rattling volley of coppers, and the Safety coming in at the same moment, decorated with laurels, favours, and a key bugle, was stopped and stripped of its ornaments. A rush took place and the 'town' was borne up the narrow streets in which Simeon's church stands, by a capital front rank of 'tassells' thrust on by hundreds more, all eager for 'a slap at a snob'.

"The Proctors had headed us here, and the tide rolled back to the Market Place. Here in the centre of a ring I found a friend of mine – a spare-lengthy-wiry ten stone man, a hard rider, a quick sparrer, and the best oar on the river. His coat and gown were torn short off between the shoulderblades & his cap tied under his chin by a broad black riband, which made his pale face and bright eye look more pale and more bright than common. He was manoeuvring his man under a lamp, and, wherever favoured by the reflection of the light, banging a 'one two' into is face (a pretty broad one), and with the most dismal effect. Four fair rounds did this straw-yard savage fight, at the end of which, in consequence of making an experiment between the 'power of resistance' in the back of his head, and an iron area railing, he was put *hors du combat.* Then a Don arrived & the ring was broken but another general melee occurred – 'Those who in quarrels interpose, Will often wipe a bloody nose'.

"I saw the Big-wig in danger, and screaming 'gown, gown' as loud as I could, I charged the man nearest him as best I might. Then I felt a hand on my collar, 'Name and college, sir' the Proctor demanded, and desired me to call upon him next morning. I never went, and whether he forgot me or was ashamed of his treatment I know and care not. Thank God, he got an infernal black eye during that night's amusements!

"Thus passed four or five hours until the College gates were locked; by which time the scene of action was pretty well cleared of 'snobs'. But some unhappy men of our college, who stayed out too late were

caught – 'From help too far, Before them walls, around them war' – and mauled most desperately. But I never shall forget, in the general charge, the number of poor devils who were run over in our advance and who must have been regularly M'Adamized, in the most approved acceptation of the word"

"Call that a fight – mere play-acting", butted in another of the company, "why if it's a proper battle you want you should have been at Figell Hall, about one and a half miles form Newmarket when Larkins and Abbott had their bout. You'll have heard of them, Larkins was well known then as 'the Cambridge Champion' and had conquered all the yokel competitors in fair combat, while Abbott was well known in the London ring. Larkins was attended by Peter Crawley and White-haired Bob and Abbott by Tom Oliver and Jack Clark. The scene of the contest was an enclosed field and it was covered with snow, being just before Christmas 1826.

"Round one and the weather was too cold to warrant any delay in going to work. Abbott let fly with his left at Larkins' cannister, but was stopped in very best style and Larkins went in to close fighting. A most desperate but scrambling rally followed in which Abbott was thrown. The next few rounds were belters but Larkins seemed to be on top in the hitting and throwing while Abbott was weakening from his exertions. Then in round six Larkins stopped a left-handed visitation intended for his nob and caught Abbott on the muzzle. A close followed and Abbott was thrown. On rising, on his second's knee, he showed first blood, from the mouth.

"In round ten Abbott screwed his energies to the stickling pace and doubled himself for mischief. After a short spar Larkins came in, when Abbott caught him such a teazer that he hit him clean off his pins. This was the first knock-down blow but from then to the conclusion of the fight in the 30th Abbott was hit down in almost every round. When placed before his antagonist in the last round he could not stand, and his seconds gave in for him.

"The fight lasted thirty-three minutes and caused great dissatisfaction in the minds of the staunch admirers of the London ring, who dropped their blunt pretty freely on the occasion. The usual whispers were in circulation, but no fight could have been more fairly fought and won".

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Pickwick was by now most heartily-sick of accounts of blood-thirsty battles undertaken for pleasure or profit. But at least the combatants had gone into it willingly, and no real damage had been done. It was not always so, as he was to learn.

It had been in May of 1833 that two labourers, John Love and Samuel Wolfe, were going home to Impington when they met up with nineteen-year-old Merrick Munsey. The lads got quarrelling in a friendly sort of way, words were exchanged and Munsey called Love a fool. "If you meet me tonight, we'll see if you can make a fool of me" Love replied, "don't you forget to come, if you do I'll remember you another time"

At seven o'clock that night they met near the boundary of the village and fought several rounds – until this attracted the attention of the Impington constable who came up with his truncheon and told them to stop or he'd 'crown them'. So the lads moved a few feet further into Histon parish outside the constable's jurisdiction and carried on. After a while Munsey got in one blow to the side of the head and followed it up with another to the body. Love sunk down senseless. He was picked up by his friends, carried to a chair, then taken to a house until he came round. But he never came round and his lifeless body was carried back to his parent's cottage.

The incident stunned the whole of the village. There was an inquest the next week when the jury brought in a verdict of manslaughter. Merrick Munsey was hauled away to the county gaol to await trial. It was August before the case came to court. Mr Cribb, the surgeon, gave his evidence that he'd

found bruises on the victim's neck, face and chest – but no external wounds. He'd examined the body the following day as well but could find no injuries that could lead to the cause of death.

Merrick said he was very sorry but he'd been put upon, he was going to be hit and had only stood up on his own defence. Mr Cawcutt and several witnesses gave him a very good character and told how they'd always known him to be a very peaceable and quiet person. It was to no avail. The jury retired to consider their verdict, and pronounced him 'guilty' – which the judge said was the proper decision. The prisoner did not appear to have been guilty of any particular offence but fighting and the deceased had been more to blame on leading him on. But there was no doubt the result had proved fatal.

All the court fell silent as the judge pronounced sentence. He took into account the fact that the lad had been imprisoned three months already and felt that he had already suffered sufficient punishment. He therefore directed that Munsey pay a fine of one shilling to the King, and be discharged. The money was paid instantly and the court cleared. It was a time for rejoicing, tempered with the sadness of how a youthful tussle so less than the excesses perpetrated by undergraduates so regularly could have disastrous effects.

"But there are times when a man must battle, despite overwhelming odds" opined a young man, who gave his name as Will Winbode. "Every one knows that the Cantabs are as a great amateurs of a 'lark' by day down the windings of the mystic Cam, as they are of a spree with the Snobs and Charleys at night around the cloisters. A few years ago myself and seven other 'men' decided to set out for a fishing spree down the river towards Milton. We secured a convenient boat, provisioned it with the necessities of life, and the proper tackle and made out way to the Roebuck at Chesterton Ferry. There my colleagues decided that a little more of the *crater*, both in the boat and in the fishermen would be no ill preventative against the cholera that still continues to rage on the margin of the stream. But I had no further need of liquor, nor any wish to have the pleasure of bathing with my clothes on, however warm the stream – and that must surely be the consequence of drinking in such a place with the local people. So I decided to go a-shore, walk on towards Backsbite & await the arrival of our boat and its truly jovial crew. There I stayed until light after light in the few habitations around the lock became extinct. The only sound was the croaking of frogs, the scuttle of rats and the slurp of the water. Of my friends there came not a sight. I dare not retrace my footsteps along the riverside in the dark & was fain to go on alone to Milton, and find the best accommodation I could in that benighted village."

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Will Winbode had not enjoyed his overnight stop in Milton – a place which boasted fine stained glass church windows, but in a private house – and at first light he had returned to Backsbite Lock to continue the search for his friends and their boat.

"As I strolled back I observed, on the river, a party in a boat, towed along by a gang of lighters towards Cambridge. I hastened towards these, but soon found neither the boat nor any in it bore any resemblance to those whom I was looking. This, however, being the surest way to meet with them if they were farther up the river, I, having told my case, offered myself as a passenger to the party, and was politely received by them into their little wherry.

"The lighters to which our boat was attached was the joint property of two stout, middle-aged individuals, each of whom officiated as water-boy in his turn, and drove the horse along the shore. When tired with that office, one resigned it to the other, who, coming on board took the care of the gang. They neither of them wanted for either assistance or lingo, and I was promised by both that I should see a lark or two before they got to Cambridge.

"The elder one confided to me: 'We are two brothers and have been up and down this here river for this last thirty years; during the last ten of which these gemmen ha' offen had case to remember Big Jack. 'Twar no longer ago than yesterday, at Ely, my baw they're, (pointing to his brother on shore),

got our rope foul a-somehowse of some gemmen's rudder, and as our oss was a-somehowse rusty, or else he flogged him just then, or somethin, but be damned if he didn't manage to shoot their whole consarn like a shovel of coal into the river, and left 'em to get their cockle shell down again as they could. Their tackle and accoutrements sunk but the gemmen swam like ducks, and their bit o' a scoop was hoisted up mast high, and hung there just like a butter-boat on a tanter-hook'.

"He had scarcely said this when he began to pour forth a pretended volley of abuse on the baw, as he called him, on the shore, 'You dannation lump, you shall catch it when I get to the sluice. I'll larn ye to drive on that dannation rate when there's gemmen a-comin down, I wool. Wool ye pull to shore I say? wool ye be arter pulling to shore? I'll make your back smell o' ropes' ends for a month, I wool, when I do get hold on ye. Pull to shore, I say – pull to shore!'

"At this signal the fellow on shore mounted the horse, and rode on as fast as he possibly get it along, while the one on board kept the helm in such direction that the first lighter was fast approaching to the opposite shore. On looking to see whither he was directing, I perceived the object of his pretended solicitude. This was no other than my poor unfortunate boat with its crew, who had apparently fallen in with some attractive company at Chesterton, and stayed there all night, and were now proceeding on their intended excursion.

"By the manoeuvres of Big Jack on board, the smaller lighter now touched the south shore of the river; and but about six feet were left between the first lighter and the shore on the north, as though for a passage for my friends. All the while a fresh volley of abuse, threats and saucy responses were vociferated by the master on board and the boy on the shore. My friends in the small boat, now suspecting the trick, made an effort to cross from the threatening narrow space to the southern side, but the lighterman at the same moment pulling his tiller to the starboard, drove the little boat completely under water. It immediately filled and left the unfortunate rowers to their shifts in the middle of the river.

"This was of course too vile an outrage to go unpunished, and I immediately informed the bargeman that I belonged to that party and did not intend that any one should escape with impunity who would behave in that manner to my friends. You have been talking of professional fighting, and of town and gown scraps on Market Hill, but what followed was a real battle!"

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As he thought back some six years to the battle on the boat, Will Winbode's voice became stronger. "I could not let my friends' boat be capsized by the ruffian bargemen, no matter what their size, so I set-to upon Big Jack in the back part of the lighter. In the scuffle, in which I own he was quite a match for me, I found I must fall overboard. Seizing hold of him to save myself, we both went over the side and fell into the water together.

"The *boy* on the horse, who was near 40 years of age, about five feet eight and well made into the bargain, now protested his innocence in the business, laying all the fault on the spirity beast on which he was sitting. This, however availed him but little, and he was soon brought to meet on terra firma one of the stoutest of those he had been an accomplice in submerging.

"The people in the little boat which was towed behind the lighter happening to be persons of Cambridge, did not fail, as is always the case, to assist against the "Cambridge men" and a general battling now ensured, sometimes fair and sometimes scarcely so, until all parties were tired of fighting. Then, as is commonly the case in occurrences of this kind, all parties mutually assisted each other. The watermen assisted us in getting up our boat and the principal part of our miscellaneous cargo, and fastened our little craft behind theirs; while we, after the moment of irritation was over, bade them participate in the wine and cognac which our baskets afforded. And, if we were not half way to Milton, as we ought to have been in the time, we were half seas over before we again reached the Ferry at

Chesterton. At that place our clothes were soon dried, our provisions once more replenished and all was soon ready for a continuation of our fishing excursion"

"I have developed a peculiar loathing for the River Cam" joined in another of the company. "In March last year I witnessed what could have been a mass drowning. It was one of the University boat racing days, and a large number of their rowing members, amounting to upwards of 30, went upon the wherry-boat in order to cross the river to get into their own boats. When they were about half way over, larking about as they usually do, they all moved to one side. As a result the chain of the wherry snapped and it went over. The scene was most distressing, for owing to some many individuals being immersed they were struggling against and impeding each other, and I saw two or three of the gentlemen taken out in an almost lifeless state. Some received severe blows, some had their clothes much torn and many were minus hats and shoes. Fortunately several medical men were soon in attendance and none were seriously injured"

"That's not what I saw in the river at Sheep's Green – I was there when John Collins' body bobbed up", interposed another. "He was a gardener for Mr Philip Hudson, the cook of Trinity College, and had disappeared a week or so earlier. His head was badly decomposed, his hat was thrust down to the nose – but when they took it off it gushed blood. He'd got all his clothes on – and something else. Tied around his neck was a piece of rope, and on the other end of the rope was a fragment of cloth. Mr Sudbury, the surgeon, made an inspection and came to the opinion that from the mark made by the rope he'd not been hanged by it, neither had he been strangled. No they reckoned how he'd been dumped in the river with a weight round his neck – and the weight had been wrapped up in a piece of cloth. When that cloth rotted away, then the body rose up. Nobody knows just what happened to him"

"Nor they don't to Dan Collins, tapster at the Rutland Arms, Newmarket – he were found drowned too. Ah but that were different – he were found drowned in a cask of beer in the cellar of the pub". All the company turned their eyes on a very small man – possibly a jockey at one time. "One of the waiters was sent down to draw off some beer and noticed a considerable amount of beer and hops was spilled all over the floor. He couldn't work out where it had come from so he had a good look round. There was one cask, about six foot six inches high, holding 440 gallons of beer. On the top it had a trap-door, about 18 inches square and inside was old Dan! They say how he had become depressed due to a change in his circumstances and had chosen that way to end it all. Mind you there are some who say that there was a lot of beer going cheap for some days afterwards – I suppose it was better than wasting it!"

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The light-hearted evening atmosphere at The Castle Hotel was suddenly transformed when a solidly-built, weather-beaten man, whose very demeanour proclaimed him to be a fenman and a farmer suddenly exploded in rage.

"You gentleman think yourself very amusing, with your tales of battles and blood – but if you had lived where I lived, and saw what I saw, then you would have no appetite for violence. It is not fun to see your flesh and blood abused, your home destroyed by a drunken mob of men that you yourself had employed, that you had tried to help – and that is what happened to me during the riots at Littleport back in 1816.

"I was an important man in those parts, I did my duty as Overseer of the Poor. I know times were hard for the working man, but they were hard for us farmers too. Everybody thought life would get better once the war with Bonaparte was done but all that happened was that prices fell and taxes rose – and the men who returned from their soldiering were a harder breed than they had been when they left the fen. They'd seen too much and could not settle back to life here.

“It was a May evening when I saw the mob come out of the Globe public house. It was the benefit club night when each man paid in his shilling and had a quart of beer. They’d been a lot of talk about the disturbances out at Downham Market when a mob had demanded wages be increased to 2/- a day and flour prices pegged at 2/6 a stone. I know one of the Littleport men, Thomas Sindall had been involved in that fracas. But the men coming out of the Globe weren’t all farm labourers by any means. They were incensed and they were intent on mischief and making as much noise as they could. One chap – name of Cornwall - said he would go and get a horn to blow. He went to the blacksmith’s shop and got a drill spout, but couldn’t make any noise with that, so he got the bugle that Stevens the baker blew when taking his hot rolls out. That weren’t much good either, so he went to Burgess the lighterman and got the horn that he used to blow when taking pleasure parties in his boat to Downham Market fair. As soon as that started sounding off hundreds of people flocked together and the mischief started.

“The mob first went to Mingey’s shop and broke his windows, then they moved on to Mr Clark’s, broke into his house and threw his pickle pots and other goods into the street. Next it was Mr Josiah Dewey’s, a retired farmer, 63-years old. They broke into his house, knocked him and his wife about, ransacked his bureau and stole money

“Me and some other farmers went out to see what was happening, along with Reverend John Vachell, the parson. He tried to persuade them to stop, but they wouldn’t listen to him, so being the magistrate he started to read the Riot Act, and they still took no notice. So he decided to go to his home and protect his family – he could see what was about to happen. Within a bit they were pounding on his door, demanding money – he gave them two pounds but all that did was to get them to increase their demands – ‘Two pounds are no use to us, we want ten’ they told him. Then he did something stupid – he produced a pistol but didn’t use it. That really incensed the mob, they pushed past him into the house and really started going through everything. The Reverend took his wife and daughter and ran off in their night-things to seek safety in Ely.

“I’d heard about their demands over wages and prices, so I offered to pay them what they wanted, straight away – not that I really meant it, but it did mean I could get off the street without being attacked. I went back to my house – the one I shared with my grandmother, Rebecca Waddelow”.

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Henry Martin shuddered as he recalled the incidents in his home village of Littleport in 1816.

“When I got to my grandmother’s house I looked back and saw the mob turn their attention to Mr Sindall’s house. He was 90 years of age and bedridden but they smashed his furniture and one of them threatened his housekeeper, Mrs Hutt with a butcher’s cleaver. Then they moved on to Mr Little’s – as nice an old gentleman as ever lived – and he gave them £2; from there they went to Mr Speechley’s and broke up his furniture. He was an old man and died soon after.

“They carried on down the street, Mr Shrewsbury gave them money – and we were next. I went to the door with £5 ready in my hand, but when I saw the mood they were in and heard that they were determined to have my blood I decided I would go down fighting. But my grandmother persuaded me that it would be better if I left by the back door and she would look after things. That fine old lady was over 70 years of age, she’d devoted her life to good works and was well known as a benefactor of the poor – they would not hurt her, I was sure of it.

“It was about ten o’clock when they got to her house – by then there was about 100 of them, several armed with large pitch-forks, iron bars and pokers. Thomas South had a butcher’s cleaver. They started hammering on the back door, so my servant, Little Sallis, went and offered them the £5 note. Richard Jessop told him he would not stop for money – ‘Henry Martin he would have’ (only I by then was some distance away). They smashed the window and poured into the house and ransacked the shop we kept, stealing tea, sugar and everything else they could find. South went up to my grandmother’s bedroom, swinging his cleaver over his head. He chopped the staircase down, chopped the drawers open and smashed her clock to pieces. They took twenty yards of woollen stuff, stole fourteen of my shirts – what good would that be if what they wanted was food – it was sheer destruction.

“One of them got more than he bargained for – he was a young lad rummaging around in the shop kicked against something what he thought was a half-pound packet of sugar. He tore the paper open and shoved a handful of it into his mouth, when he soon found it was mustard! He ran to a pail of beer to wash his mouth out – but they were all drinking, getting quarrelsome amongst themselves, fighting -–it was terrible.

“My grandmother had another lady with her, Mary Cutlack who was scared out of her wits – but gran must have been too, for she had to beg them to spare her life. As well as smashing her house to bits, they also took three pound notes! Witness after witness saw it all happen, they identified several of the people who committed this outrage, even though the men blew out all the candles so they could hide in the darkness. But what happened when it came to trial – the rioters were all acquitted on a technicality!

“You might say I should have been there to defend her – I think so myself, but make no mistake, if I’d been there, I’d have been killed – George Crow said so when he was standing on the scaffold!

“As for me I got away from the house and met up with Hugh Evans. He was coming through the village in his chaise; we got part way to Ely when we were stopped on the highway by a mob who came up to both doors of the carriage and demanded money. There were twenty of them, some armed with sticks. They wanted a pound note to let us continue the journey. We gave them what silver we had – I did not want to make a show of resistance, for if they’d known it was me … well I would not be here tonight!
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As soon as news reached Ely on that horrendous May night in 1816, the magistrates swung into action. The principal inhabitants were roused from their beds, tradesmen called up and sworn in as special constables – though John Olley, landlord of the White Lion was not amongst them, his sister being very much alarmed had locked him in his bedroom and would not let him out.

When the vicar of Littleport and his family arrived with his account of the disturbances it added to the terror. This was not something that could be handled by civilians, they needed military help. Thomas Archer, a member of the legal firm of Archer, Evans and Archer volunteered to gallop as fast as he could to Bury St Edmunds where a regiment of the First Royal Dragoon Guards was stationed. But this would take time, in the meantime they were on their own.

Early next morning, Ely Fair Thursday, the Littleport rioters prepared to march on Ely to press their case for relief from hardship. They remembered the military training they had received when planning to defend an invasion from Boneparte – how they were trained to borrow a farmer’s cart on which they’d mount some of their punt guns. But in Littleport that morning there were no farmers to be seen to ask – so they commandeered a wagon and horses belonging to Mr Tansley. Once they had mounted

all the guns they could find it looked a formidable weapon. Off they set, about 250 of them, many armed with guns, pitchforks, bludgeons, clubs, hatchets and other implements of persuasion. And they took their wives and children to make a good day out.

As they approached the City they found a reception committee awaiting them in the form of Mr Metcalfe and some other gentleman. "What do you want", they'd asked. "We want the price of a stone of flour per day". "You shall have it – now go back home" the magistrates replied. But the Littleport men had come too far to turn back now. They were in fighting mood – they would carry on and have a randy. Again Mr Metcalfe tried to reason with them – he would meet them on the Market Place and talk things over there.

It took considerable courage to face such a crowd of men even when addressing them from the comparative safety of the upper window of the White Hart, but Mr Metcalfe had the courage of his convictions. His eloquence, his persuasion, his offers of assistance seemed to be successful. His promises were greeted with ringing cheers, the invaders fired their guns into the air, the crisis seemed averted. They would have a drink on it – but not too much mind – and then go home. Some did just that. But others did not, they had scores to settle.

Margaret Rickwood was the miller's wife. She found a mob on her doorstep, demanding to speak to her husband – but he was out of town. She asked what it was they wanted – "Fifty pounds or we'll pull your house and windmill down" was the answer. "My good men, you shall have it, but don't break or destroy anything", she replied. She told her son to go to Mr Edwards at the bank and get the money immediately but before he could get back she heard some of her windows being broken. She could wait no longer; off she set herself up Broad Street to the bank, the mob following behind. As she turned the corner she saw Mr Edwards the banker coming towards her. "Where was the money", she asked. "They shall never have a penny – not even if there are a thousand of them, I will not give in to blackmail" came his response. Margaret begged him – it was her money, she could do with it what she wanted – and anyway her home was now undefended, who knows what they might be doing to it. The banker remained defiant – until somebody struck him on the head, causing blood to flow. Then he changed his mind – but they would have to get it from the bank

Robert Edwards, Chief Constable of Ely was the agent for Messrs Mortlock's bank. He too sought to resist paying the money, taking his official constable's staff and confronting the mob, asking by what authority they were demanding the £50. He was immediately struck on the head with a bludgeon. He stood with his back to the bank door, barring the way – and was struck again. Seeing that his life was in danger he agreed that three of the men should enter and collect the cash on behalf of the rest. But by now they Littleport rioters had been joined by others from Little Downham and Ely, one representative from each group was allowed in and each received sixteen one-pound notes and thirteen shillings in coin. That left one shilling over – who was to have that. A discussion took place – each group was in it together, the money must be divided equally. Edwards gave each a groat in copper and the mob left peacefully, each contingent going their own way.
Meanwhile across the city other pillaging was taking place

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As Henry Martin related many of his Littleport countrymen had returned home on that fateful day in May 1816, but a number continued to rampage round the city of Ely. A mob, several armed with bludgeons and one with a gun, attacked William Cooper's baker's shop – after all he was, in their eyes, "a bigger rogue than Rickwood" in the matter of profiteering. The crowd of about 200 angry men and women began to call for "a crow or a mattock" to pull the shop down, but then two of the magistrates managed to negotiate; the building was saved in exchange for a £5 note. From there it was on to another miller, George Stevens; this time they wanted £50, but settled for £10. The rest of the day was spent eating and drinking, but with money in their pockets (and weapons in their hands) they found the publicans reluctant to demand payment. Then having, made their point, the rioters started back to their own village.

Once free from terror the inhabitants of Ely made a show of defiance, seizing some of those found stumbling drunk around the streets – only to begin to panic again when word came that the Littleport men were planning to come back to get them. The prisoners were released.

But where were the soldiers that Thomas Archer had galloped off to Bury St Edmunds for? On arrival he had been told that only a corporal's guard of about sixteen men could be spared. But that would be enough, for as one commented "Last year we were in the battle of Waterloo, and now we are going to fight the battle of Hullaballo". The professional soldiers travelled down the Stuntney Causeway and arrived at the High Bridge where they found an anxious group of inhabitants waiting for them. Their officer gave the order: "With ball cartridge, load" and in single file they cantered up Back Hill and along the Gallery, towards the Lamb Hotel. They made their way through the principal streets, intent on reassuring the respectable citizens and intimidating the others.

But they could not frighten one half-witted man who seemed to enjoy trotting behind the horses – and then decided he might like to try riding one. Before the dragoon knew what was happening the man had vaulted up behind him, drawn the sword from its scabbard and jumped off again, scampering along the street and waving the razor-sharp weapon about with great glee. Other soldiers reeled into action, drawing their weapons and turning to cut the fellow down. They were dissuaded by Mr Spooner who knew the poor idiot, wrenched the sword from the foolish aggressor, and returned it to its proper owner.

It was the only active resistance the soldiers found, though they were far from welcome. Ely memories were still too full of the last time soldiers had galloped into the city – to whip the brave militia lads during the mutiny of 1809 – a tale Pickwick had learned a day or so earlier. And although the rioters had terrorised innocent citizens, it was the soldiers who killed one – a thatcher working on the roof of the great tithe barn whose call for more reed was misunderstood by the officer in command of the troops. He halted his men beside the barn and gave the order to fire. Pierced by a dozen musket balls the poor thatcher rolled from the roof, his body falling upon the great folding door of the barn, which had been left half open. And there it hung, dripping with blood, for over three days, the officer swearing that anyone who dared to remove it should share the same fate.

Next morning the Ely Militia had been mobilised & more reinforcements arrived in the shape of a contingent of Royston Volunteer Cavalry. With them came that most important of men (at least in his own eyes) – the Reverend Sir Henry Bate Dudley, Baronet, Friend of the Prince Regent, Prebend of Ely Cathedral, Rector of Willingham, Editor of The Morning Post, and universally known as the "Fighting Parson" following an earlier altercation involving a lady.

Sir Henry took charge of the situation. He gathered his forces together and at the head of his army headed off, pell-mell, to Littleport. As they approached the village a contingent were sent off across the fields to approach from the rear. The down the main street they charged, ready for anything. At first there was no-one to fight, yesterday's rioters were today's hung-over yokels, many rejoicing that their peaceful protest had been successful, the magistrates having granted their just demands.

Rumours of the invading forces spread like wildfire. From cottage and fen men made their way to the George and Dragon public house. They placed benches and taproom settles against the windows and prepared for a final stand. They would not be taken easily.

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The men gathered at the Old Castle Inn listened intently as Henry Martin reached the climax of his tale, of how the Reverend Sir Henry Bate Dudley had led his contingent of cavalry, militia and gentlemen into Littleport to round up the rioters who had terrorised Ely. Although he did not say so, Henry's listeners were under the impression that he, himself, had been in the forefront, anxious to avenge himself for the attack on his own house.

"Sir Henry made his way up to the door of the George and Dragon and called on the men to surrender. After a while the door opened, and there stood James Cammell, defiance was etched on his face. If they wanted them, they should have to get them – 'Come on you Piccadilly Butchers', he taunted, 'if you dare'.

“Well Sir Henry collared him and would have held him, too, had not Daniel Wilson, the blacksmith, clouted him over the head with an iron bar. Then all hell broke loose. Thomas South opened fire from an upstairs window and one dragoon, William Wallance was wounded in the wrist. This man had fought in the Peninsular wars – he had been at the battle of Waterloo alongside Soham men – and received many wounds in his country’s service, but none were as serious as this; it rendered him a cripple for life – the Littleport ratepayers are still having to maintain him. This was no boy’s play now.

“Sir Henry went up to the wall of the pub, and lifting his stick on high brought it down with might and main on the barricaded windows; then putting his back against the wall he gave the order to fire! You should have been there, gentlemen. The crash of the glass! The screams of the women! The firing of the assailed and the assailants! The cheers of both parties in that besieged town. Bullets whizzed in all directions – one would have gone through my hat, had my hat not been stolen by the rioters!

“The dragoons rushed the doorway where two of the fenmen were stationed to prevent entrance, one armed with an iron bar wrenched from a kitchen grate, the other with a tremendous bludgeon. The path leading to the door was about three feet above the level of the road, and so narrow that only two men with horses could come up at a time. As fast as the soldiers charged, despite carbines or cutlass, those two desperate defenders thrust horses and men off the path and back on to the road. For a while they stood seemingly invulnerable. Volleys were fired at them every time the soldiers were thrust off, but not one of them received a wound.

“Then Sir Henry himself rushed the door and seized the iron bar; this distracted the other defender and gave the soldiers the opportunity they needed to charge in. The battle raged inside the pub, but by now the result was not in doubt. Fenmen might call themselves tigers, but not even tigers can resist the might of the British Dragoons.”

The rioters were brought out of the house and marshalled into a group on the roadway, surrounded by the cavalry. While they were being guarded Thomas Sindall made an attempt to escape. He tried to seize the carbine from trooper William Porter and a tussle ensued. Sindall tugged, Porter resisted and in the end was successful. Sindall then decided to make a run for it. ‘Stop or I fire’, Porter shouted; Sindall carried on running. Porter levelled his musket, took aim and shot him. The bullet entered the back of the head and came out through the eye. It passed through the bar of a gate and penetrated an inch and a half into a brick wall.

William Rowell went and turned Sindall’s body over, but he was dead. His sister in law went up and tied her pocket handkerchief around the hole in his head. The startling effect of this incident, witnessed by all the other assembled prisoners, was heightened by the arrival of the Lynn coach with its usual load of passengers while the dead body was lying bleeding on the road. One of the passengers, a tradesman from Downham Market, was so unmanned by the shock that on arriving at his home, twelve miles distant, he went out of his mind.

Nor was Thomas Sindall the only casualty.

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News of the shooting of Thomas Sindall had spread around Littleport like lightning on that May day in 1816. Elsewhere struggles continued; John Badger received a sabre cut which took away part of his chin, while Isaac Harley was also shot, but survived as he was wearing three waistcoats that lessened the impact of the bullet; his survival was however to be short lived.

Despite all their struggles the fenmen could not long resist the overwhelming strength of the soldiers; dozens were rounded up and taken under armed escort to Ely where they were flung into the Bishop’s gaol to await their fate. Others fled for the safety of the surrounding fenland followed closely by mounted soldiers. Two fenmen thought themselves safe after they got to the banks of the Ouse ahead

of their pursuers, for there was no bridge nearby and just one boat. But as the fenmen rowed for their lives the Dragoons coolly dismounted and drew their pistols. They removed their tunics and dived into the sluggish, murky river, swimming steadily with one arm up out of the water, pistol in hand. Two more men were added to the captives.

Elsewhere other solders were falling behind their pray, finding their way blocked by fen ditches, which they dubbed 'big gutters'. Fenmen had ways of leaping them, using long jumping poles, soldiers had no such skills. Isolated cottages were an obvious target for both chased and chaser and in many the escapers found a willing helper. Billy Buckenham who lived down Sedge Fen had four of the rioters hid up when he saw the soldiers approaching along the drove. He pushed the men under the bed, then got a big bunch of stinging nettles and gave himself, his wife and six children a good rub over the hands and face with them. When the troops banged on the door demanding admission Billy was happy to oblige – they could search where they liked, as long as they did not disturb his children who were dying from the smallpox. The soldiers departed, the men escaped.

Others were not so lucky. A labourer at Lakenheath took two into his house, then hurried off to Littleport to betray them and to pocket a reward for his efforts. The money might have been welcome, but the man was not; his life was one of constant fear of retribution.

Bob Dewey was working on the riverbank a few hundred yards from his cottage in Wellmere Fen. There'd been a seepage the winter before and they needed to dig out a section of the bank to remake it. Being down in the trench, puddling the clay with his bare feet, he were unseen by the two soldiers who went knocking at his door. When Dewey returned home he found the door shut; inside he found his young wife lying on a couch, stripped naked, in a dead faint. On the floor nearby were two soldiers, dead drunk on rhubarb wine with which they had slaked their thirst after committing the rape. Those two soldiers were never seen again. The riverbank was filled up, though somehow the work seemed not to be quite as good as usual, for still water managed to find its way past whatever it was had been laid there.

Some of the escapers got well out of the area – Isaac Harley and John Dennis made it as far as West Dereham before they were detained; at least three made their way to London. One was Aaron Layton, an Ely brick-maker, who wrote home to his wife to put her mind at rest:

"I got to sint tives about 3 aClok and at kisby hut and brackfasted their and then Came to rampton and thir I taken Coch to London and went to my uncle James ouse emeditly and then to fishers and did sleep thir. I shall go to morer monen to sint Gorg Squa for that are aGon to bild a Grat deal thir and if not thir to bath on Wednisday monen by the Coch. Give my love to all in Quiren frinds. Pray Clere my house as sone as possibil but before you do wash my Briches look in the wach Poket and thir you will find a one Pound note loose wich I for got bot think I shall not want it."

The letter was his downfall. It was intercepted and he was arrested.

Others were more fortunate. William Gotobed hid in the fens for several days and on more than one occasion the soldiers were so close to him that he could hear them talking. After a while he made his way to an isolated farmhouse, Apes Hall, whose owner, Mr Crystall drove him away in his trap. All went well till they reached Bury St Edmunds when who should they see but the Littleport Vicar's groom, Mr Crabb. "We are done for now", thought Gotobed, but Crabb either did not see them or did not say anything about it and he got clear away. Sometime later he was sitting in a public house in London when he heard some Bow Street runners enquiring after him; he kept his head down. Later however he heard that things had gone badly at home, his wife and family were destitute; he returned to Littleport but found it was not the place he had left. For a start many of his friends were missing.

Henry Martin related how although nearly 90 of the Littleport rioters had been locked up in the Bishop's gaol at Ely, still the farmers feared further uprising. Rumours circulated that labourers at Soham and Isleham were ready to riot. The magistrates at Wisbech wrote to the Home secretary, Lord Sidmouth, begging for military assistance to maintain the peace. Three corps of Yeomany, some 120 men, together with 300 special constables were soon on the streets.

Others confirmed that the panic had spread to Cambridge due to the appearance of numerous knots of strange countrymen coming in with large sticks. The Mayor, Colonel Mortlock, apprehending that this might have been preparatory to an intended entry of the fen rioters had convened the Magistracy in the Town Hall and sworn in some three hundred of the principal inhabitants as special constables. The Vice Chancellor and various Heads of Colleges also attended and resolved to put arms into the hands of the students of their respective colleges, if found necessary. The situation must have been frightening, mused Pickwick, for students had enough of a reputation for lawlessness without being armed as well!

The situation quietened down, but it was a silence of sullenness, not of subdued spirit, as Martin explained. "I would not have been surprised if we'd had some stacks and even houses burnt. There were murmurs and whispers, and sulky countenances; there were invidious comparisons between rich and poor. We were upon our guard and instituted nightly patrols". But the situation would continue to simmer until the fate of the Littleport men had been resolved.

The Home Secretary decided to appoint a Special Commission to get them convicted as soon as possible. But for that he would need three judges.68-year old James Burrough was one, Charles Abbott another – he had been born the son of a wigmaker and had accumulated a vast fortune. Both were men of proven ability. The third Judge was a joke.

Edward Christian was a man who might know little of rioters but everything about mutineers – for was not his brother the Fletcher Christian of the Bounty. He should certainly know the law, for he was Cambridge University Professor of the Laws of England, having previously gained experience as a judge on the Northern circuit where he had become the subject of practical jokes. His legal battles had included the long-running saga between the University and the heirs of Sir Jacob Downing – of which Pickwick had heard.

He had also sought the position of Registrary to the Bedford Level, competing with William Saffery, a Downham Market solicitor. As the votes were counted it became apparent there was little between them so Christian seized the initiative by locking himself inside the Fen Office where the records were kept, barricading the windows and doors to prevent his eviction. After some days he left his clerks in possession whilst he took some fresh air. It was then that his opponent struck and when Christian returned he found the tables turned and himself refused admission. Next day the two rival solicitors started negotiations, the one in the street, the other at an upstairs window. Surely the Professor could be allowed in, just to remove some of his personal papers – after which he would leave quietly. To this Saffery agreed, but took the precaution of opening the door very carefully; he found the crafty Christian backed up with three burly assistants who immediately tried to force entry. In the struggle the Professor succeeded in getting his head through the door but there he was pinioned, hat inside, body out in the street. And there he would have stayed had not he begged permission to withdraw, leaving his hat behind as a trophy. Frustrated in his use of force he turned to the law, the case was debated at great length, the votes counted again and again. Finally it was agreed – Saffery had polled 82 votes, Christian 81.

On one occasion in Cambridge some mischievous ruffians had damaged some newly-planted shrubs at St John's college, a crime that Christian denounced as being a capital offence, urging the culprit to surrender himself to the rigours of the law. This prompted a Corpus man to pen a rhyme:

"So the Johnians, whose trees were most cruelly mangled,
And delicate sucklings atrociously strangled,

Invite the sly culprit who did the black act,
To swing at the gallows, by owning the fact"

But by 1816 Professor Christian was the Chief Justice of the Isle of Ely – now he could surely prescribe the gallows for real!

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Monday the 17th of June 1816 had been a day of some excitement in Ely. Early in the morning many of the most respectable citizens were seem heading out of the city, along the Cambridge road, their eyes skinned for the arrival of a most important party. By ten o'clock they were back, escorting the three judges who would preside at the trial of the Littleport rioters.

The scene outside the courthouse on the Market Place was very different to the last extended gathering there, when magistrates had pleaded – successfully – for most of the rioters to return home. If only all had followed their example the present gathering would not have been necessary.

Once the court had been formally opened the judges departed for breakfast with the Bishop at his Palace. They then processed in some splendour to the Cathedral for a service. The Bishop's butler led the way bearing his master's sword of State; behind came Bishop Sparke himself, waddling like some fat duck. After him were the three judges, dressed in long capes with fur on the collars, their heads covered with wigs of long hair & one still wiping the egg-yolk off his lips. They were followed by fifty of the principal inhabitants carrying white wands and trying to appear important – but instead looking like a lot of boys with osiers, going fishing. It all detracted somewhat from the planned magnificent of the occasion.

Of course Sir Henry Bate Dudley was not one to miss the opportunity to make his mark as an orator in front of such a congregation. He won praise for his most animated and impressive delivery of his text: "The Law is not made for a righteous man, but for the lawless and disobedient". Nor was Mr Skeats the cathedral organist about to miss his opportunity. He had composed a new anthem for the occasion to be performed alongside Handel's "Why do the Heathen so furiously rage together", though both were eclipsed by the spirited rendering of the Hallelujah Chorus that concluded the service.

Then the judges departed for the courthouse in their four-wheeled carriage, soldiers sealing off the street behind them to prevent onlookers following too closely. But they were treated to the sight of the somewhat rotund Bishop struggling to get into his own coach. The earlier breakfast seemed to have been just too filling, for no matter how the cleric puffed and drew in his sides the carriage door seemed just too narrow for his bulk. Flunkies gathered round to push and shove and eventually the Bishop flopped inside. But this was not the end of the entertainment for as the coachman whipped the horses to take the strain and the coach jerked forward so the off-side hind wheel of the coach came off. Down dropped the vehicle with such a jolt that the Bishop turned white as a sheet, then red in fury as the assembled multitudes mocked his misfortune. Now the soldiers moved in, jabbing the crowds with the butts of their guns and clearing the streets of fenmen who were by now roaring with laughter, despite the seriousness of the occasion.

By the time they finally got to the courthouse they found the doors locked and guarded – their presence was not welcomed. Inside the Grand Jury was being sworn in and addressed by Mr Justice Abbot in terms that left no doubt that the Government intended the proceedings to be a warning to rioters everywhere. "It was of the highest importance that people were convinced by the awful lesson which may (though everybody knew he meant 'will') here be taught" he thundered. The message went round the country with remarkable speed – in fact the address delivered in Ely on the Monday afternoon was carried by London newspapers the very next

morning, causing some to wonder whether editors had not been furnished with a copy of the speech well before it was delivered.

And nobody was in any doubt what that lesson would be. The death penalty was possible for dozens of less serious charges than those facing the Littleport men; the authorities were plainly determined to make an example, and it was not as if the accused would have anybody to speak for them. The illiterate fenmen would have to defend themselves.

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The trial of the Littleport rioters seemed to drag on and on – at least it did to their families, many of whom made the daily journey to the Ely courthouse, only to find they were not to be admitted to hear the evidence.

Other Littleport folk were inside, some giving their version of events – and they did not return home to Littleport each night, for fear of some 'accident' befalling them on the way. Indeed for years afterwards their neighbours avoided them, spitting on the ground as they passed. One even gave up going to chapel because the boys in the congregation kept fiddling with a piece of string with a noose in it, which quite ruined his concentration on the sermon. And somehow his hens never laid as well as they had before, and some never lay again, being found hanging from his door latch.

Inside 31-year old Thomas Armiger, 16-year old Christopher Butcher and William Buck, only 13, were in fear of their lives – they were people used to an outdoors life, now they were being cooped up inside a stuffy courtroom, and locked up in the dreaded Bishop's gaol each evening.

But for the prosecutors everything was going well. Time after time the jury was coming up with the 'guilty' verdicts – and soon they had so many convictions that it really was not worth carrying on. They had meant to set an example, & enough had been done to teach the inhabitants of the Isle – ostensibly meaning the Isle of Ely, but with no doubt that the message would be absorbed by all within this sceptred Isle – of the necessity of obedience to their laws. They would learn to respect for the peace and property of their neighbours and of course their betters. It was time to show clemency and allow some 50 of the prisoners to return to their community free men, provided they behaved themselves in future.

But Justice Abbot could not let them depart without an exhortation that on returning home they should avoid all excess of liquor, and not to drink and tipple at public houses. Such practices were most pernicious to themselves and injurious to their families – and surely it was drink that had led them to their present plight. If some of the men muttered that it was starvation that had driven them to drink in the first place then they did so beneath their breath, glad of any excuse to get out of that hated city of Ely and back to the open fields and open skies of the fens. Not all were so lucky.

On Saturday the courtroom doors were finally flung open to the wives and families of the twenty-four men still incarcerated. From across the fen they came, dressed in their Sunday best, eagerly looking forward to a glimpse of their loved ones and nursing a faint hope that the leniency shown to others might still apply to them too. Soon the room was packed and reeking of fenland bodies, growing riper by the minute as the time dragged on. Their eyes scanned every corner waiting for that moment when a door would open and their menfolk were revealed to them. What a change a week had wrought, their skin had turned pale, their eyes seemed dead, their very strength gone.

Then the Judges took their place – prompting muffled laughter at the ludicrous site of so many big wigs, despite the solemnity of the occasion. Any hope of leniency was dashed as soon as Mr Justice Abbot addressed the prisoners. They had thought that by their strength and threats they could oppress and intimidate their peaceable neighbours and even resist the strong arm of the law itself. These were capital offences, there was only one sentence. He paused and placed a black cap on his white wig as he

intoned the names of Aaron Chevall, Richard Jessop, William Dann, Robert Crabb, Richard Rutter, John Pricke, James Cammell … on and on … Sarah Hobbs – the only woman amongst them. On each he pronounced the sentence of death.

The families were struck dumb in shock, then exploded in anguish, shrieks and curses echoed around the court, prompting the Judge to warn that if they did not keep quiet he would put his black hat on again and hang a few more. And then, as if realising the hatred around him, he held out a small hope – that perhaps the Crown might show clemency, perhaps all might not have to hang. But make no bones about it an example would have to be made; five had better start praying – it was certainly the gallows for them

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Name by name Mr Justice Abbot specified which of the prisoners before him would certainly hang for their part in the Littleport riots.

The first to be sentenced was 42-year old William Beamiss, not a labourer but a shoemaker: "a person whose condition in life ought to have taught him to restrain any unruly and turbulent disposition, in his less enlightened neighbours. But you boasted of your own situation and took with you your own son to be a partner in your crime". And now that son was amongst those sentenced to death whose life depended on the King's mercy. Beamiss had extorted money. Now he would hang.

The next to be named was George Crow, a labourer who had been one of those who had ransacked the house of Rebecca Waddelow, the old widow woman. But somehow Abbot forgot to say that farmer Henry Martin also lived there, one of the men the rioters were trying to persuade to remedy the conditions they were complaining about. And surely Crow had been amongst those found Not Guilty by the jury for this offence, discharged on a technicality. Yes indeed – but the prosecutor had amended the charges and got the verdict he wanted second time around.

John Dennis, a publican, had claimed that he had been forced to take part, he had convinced himself of that fact but could not convince the jury. They felt he had been a ringleader, he would hang. So would Isaac Harley who had assaulted the Rector – after the Reverend Gentleman had pulled a pistol on those wishing to discuss their grievances with him. Making up the first batch of executions would be Thomas South whose improper use of a cleaver whilst rampaging around the house of poor, rich, widow Waddelow, had provided one of the most emotive of the images conjured up to the jury and reporters. As for the rest, they must await their fate.

As the prisoners were bundled out of sight, so the onlookers collapsed into shocked silence. Numbly they emerged into the sunshine and started the long plod home to Littleport. A few stayed behind plotting ways to release their friends from the Bishop's creaky gaol. After all it had been easy enough to break out of in the past. But now there were soldiers with guns and bayonets whose eyes were everywhere. Better leave if for the night and see what could be arranged in the days to follow.

Throughout the week plots were hatched, plans discussed – and weapons were hidden up by womenfolk who knew too well that a scythe, slasher, hook or hatchet in the hands of an enraged fenman would be no match for razor-sharp sword wielded by a professional soldier. There had been too much misery caused already to want to encourage more. All they could do was wait.

Day by day dragged by while in Ely five new gallows were being erected on a piece of waste ground at the Mill Pits, some two hundred yards on the right hand side of the tollgate leading to Cambridge. Sir Henry had been put in charge of arrangements and determined to make a fine show. One thing he needed was a tumbril cart & two horses to convey the convicts on their last journey. But nowhere could he find one. Farmer after farmer was approached but

somehow none admitted to having such a conveyance. In the end a messenger had to be sent post haste to Cambridge to hire a cart for the princely price of five guineas. Then the man who had been appointed to lead it to the gallows disappeared. They found his body head downwards in a cess-pit behind his house with a card pinned on him which read: 'A stinking death to a stinking liver'.

There even seemed to be a problem with the coffins. The Bishop awarded the contract for five fine coffins at two pounds ten each to a local carpenter, who promptly disappeared. Searchers found his workshop had been broken into & the new coffins smashed into matchwood. Weeks later the brewery found its pump drawing water from the river was not working as well as it ought to. Jammed into the pipe, trussed up like a chicken was the unfortunate carpenter. Such misfortune struck others who were associated with the forthcoming proceedings; the man who took the bread and cheese to those putting up the scaffold was found lying on the road with his legs smashed to pieces. Lying alongside him was a crowbar. Soldiers were detailed to guard the Cambridge craftsmen constructing the gallows, and patrol the area both day and night, armed and ready for anything. As the week dragged on and the day of the executions neared, so tensions mounted higher.

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As the morning of 28th June 1816 finally dawned the fens were alive with people making their way towards Ely. From Stretham and Stuntney, Sutton and Southery they came with some air of excitement. From Little Downham and Littleport they came with an overwhelming air of despair. For they were to witness the execution of five of their number convicted of riot, and many of the onlookers would be all too well aware that but for the grace of God it might have been they themselves on the gallows.

At least they would be given an appropriate send off. No expense was to be spared and even five gallows had been newly constructed – better than the usual method of standing the condemned man in the back of a cart before whipping the horse forward and leaving the victim suspended.

At nine o'clock the crowd assembled in front of the Bishop's gaol in the Market Street watched a tumbil cart draw up at the entrance. It was covered with a black cloth, the wheels painted black to match. The horse was black and covered with a black rug; it had three black plumes fastened to its head.

After a short pause the condemned men emerged into their last morning. They wore white caps – tied with black ribbon. Each was helped to climb onto the cart and to sit down on the seats provided, one for each. If they realised they were sitting on the coffin into which their bodies would be shortly lowered they gave no sign of it. But the onlookers had no doubt. And if the onlookers harboured plans for their rescue they had to rethink them, for clambering up in front and behind the prisoners were soldiers, their swords drawn. Two men boarded the front of the coach, their faces covered. These were the hangmen; they stared straight ahead seemingly impervious to the silent hatred that accompanied their every move.

As the cart started off it was followed by a four-wheeler with a chap inside who looked more scared that those in the tumbril. Then came another, and another and behind them a long procession of some three hundred of the principal inhabitants of the Isle, bearing white wands. Bringing up the rear was Mr Edwards and three other Chief Constables, their staves of office covered with black crepe.

The procession wound its way along St Mary's Street and on to the place of execution, its route lined by onlookers. The bells of the St Mary's church tolled their passage, and each of the condemned men was seen to be praying out loud, his voice drowned by their clanging.

The journey seemed never-ending, it was eleven o'clock before the scaffold was reached and the men, shackled hand and foot, assisted out of the cart and up onto the platform in full view of the thousands of onlookers who had assembled there. Each of them was placed under a dangling noose and the hangman went along and slipped it over their heads. The parson – the scared-looking chap from the following carriage – started reading the burial service, shaking visibly. Then he looked around, turned white and stammered through the whole thing again. For the procession of the great and good had not yet finally arrived at the scene – there could be no execution until everybody was able to see.

And there could be no execution until the prisoners had said their last words. John Dennis the publican spoke first exhorting the onlookers to avoid drunkenness, Sabbath-breaking, whoremongery and bad company – and in particular to avoid rioting. "I freely forgive those who gave evidence against me …". "And I forgive Mr Tansley that he swore falsely against me", added William Beamiss; "And we never really meant to murder Henry Martin", pleaded George Crow – "Oh yes, he would have been murdered had he been found", corrected Dennis. They tried to shake hands with each other, but their arms were tied and they could not. Then the white caps on their heads were pulled down over their faces.

It was the signal for the hangman to pull the bolt; the bottom of the platform fell out and the five were left hanging in the air. The parson fell down in a faint and the hangman had to lift him out of the way before he could get on to the next part of the job, which was to swing on the legs of the five men until their necks were stretched. The bodies were left to hang for a couple of hours before being cut down and put in their coffins, the rope still around their necks. They were taken to a cottage in Gaol Street where hundreds of people filed past. Nobody saw who it was that cut off the rope from around the neck of one of the victims, but pieces of that cord were treasured in various Littleport homes. Next morning the coffins were interred in the churchyard of St Mary's. It was over – at least for those five. But what of the others also condemned to death?

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Once the first five Littleport rioters had breathed their last and been interred in one grave in St Mary's churchyard, Ely, thoughts turned to the fate of the other twenty-three men and one woman, still under sentence of death. They were not left pondering for long.

The day after the execution news came that another nine would be removed from their family and friends. But for their relations there would be no chance to grieve and start again – they would still be living, but on the other side of the world. Aaron Chevill, Joseph Easy, John Jefferson and James Newell were to be transported to Botany Bay for life; Richard Rutter could return after fourteen years, Mark Benson, John Easy and John Walker after half that period. But everybody knew that their chance of actually getting there was slim, and Botany Bay was an awful place – indeed its name had already been given to various isolated bleak fen farms.

Before anybody had chance to react the men had been smuggled out of Ely en route to the dreaded Newgate prison. Then it was on to the next stage of the journey, to the prison hulks moored in the Thames estuary. There they were locked down within the decks from nightfall till morning, when the hatches were opened. At least they were fortunate in that it was summer time for in winter the lockdown lasted some 16 hours. Once the hatches shut they were on their own, amongst other villains. Neither the captain nor any other officers ever visited the parts of the ship in which the prisoners were confined during the night-time hours, except in cases of disturbance or emergency. Even then it would be doubtful whether they would ever emerge alive.

The conditions endured by the Littleport men were recorded in a letter sent at the time from Joseph Turner who shared their cells. He tried to paint a rosy picture: "We are ironed and go out to work. We have barley and oatmeal night and morning and beef for dinner four nights a week, and the other days bread and cheese. There is a school and chapel in the hulk which are regularly attended and it is far

from a reprobate place as we were led to believe, for if a person is inclined every encouragement is allowed him to improve his morals". But despite this the Justinia Hulk was a stinking pit, especially for fenmen used to the open air with no hope of reprieve.

Yet reprieve came for two of their number. John Walker was pardoned – the flimsy evidence for his involvement in the worst of the excesses had been challenged. Mark Benson was also spared; he had become too ill to travel & was released. He died a few months later.

The other seven prepared themselves for the hell of the voyage. Even the Government was concerned about conditions on the convict ships. A Select Committee had reported in 1812 that: "The owner of the vessel provides a surgeon who is instructed to keep a diary not only of the illness on board but of the number of convicts admitted on deck; of the scraping of the decks, cleaning of the berths and general treatment of the transports. The sick are to be visited twice a day, the healthy once. He is ordered to take the greatest precaution against infection, and to fumigate the clothes of those taken to hospital. He has not only the power to use medicines, but also the stores if any sick be in want of greater nourishment". And there was an additional incentive – the surgeon would be paid 10s 6d for every live convict landed in New South Wales.

The Master was also under instruction to be "particularly cautious to receive no diseased person on board during the voyage; a proportion of the prisoners is daily to be admitted upon deck and the berths of all cleaned and aired". All this needed to be logged in a book to be submitted to the Governor on arrival. If he had done his job properly we was awarded a gratuity of £50. If not he could be prosecuted. Normally about 200 men or women convicts were embarked on board a ship, with a guard of 30 men and an officer. The reforms had some effect; whereas in the early years of the century some one in ten had died on the voyage, by the time the Littleport men left this figure had fallen to only one in 46 – at least so the official reports stated.

All this depended on having a good captain. Many did not.

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While Littleport folk were recovering from the shock of discovering that the nine rioters sentenced to transportation were already en route to the prison hulks more anguish broke out. It was caused by the circulation of an article that somebody had culled from "The Examiner" newspaper of 24th March 1816. The cutting was read again and again, those able to read soon knowing the words by heart as they repeated them to family after family. With each telling the horrors grew, but in truth little could add to the detail provided by a convict who had arrived at Botany Bay on a prison ship.

"I will state my usage on the voyage which was beyond belief, for we had the biggest rascal of a Captain that ever existed, but God rewarded him for it – he died and was thrown overboard for the sharks, for when he was in the hot climates, he kept us confined betwixt decks, we was obliged to stop us stark naked, and then the sweat ran down us like rain, which caused a brain fever, which went all thro' the ship; the men died like rotten sheep, but as God would have it, I escaped the disorder, which was a miracle, for out of 200 men only 20 escaped it, I suppose there was 150 at one time that could not help themselves to a drink of water, and when we got near the harbour there were only three that was able to work at the ship. The Captain and the first and second Mates was thrown overboard, and the third Mate was bedfast, and not a man on board that could navigate the ship, and we made for an uninhabited part of the Island, But at last we fell in with the Bloxebury, that had women convicts on board, and we got assistance from that ship, or else we certainly must have perished."

Would they arrive, would they live to serve their sentence, would they live to make the return journey?

Ten other convicted rioters sentenced to death had been told their punishment would be reduced to a year's imprisonment in Ely gaol – provided the King agreed. It was just a formality. It would happen. It did not! King George III was mad, everybody knew it, that's why the Prince of Wales was acting as Regent. The news came through, Sarah Hobbs could stay at Ely, the rest would have to serve their time in the prison hulks at Sheerness – and that time had been increased to seven years. And if it was to be that long, why they would perhaps transport them after all!

William Beamiss the younger – whose father had met his end on the scaffold – together with Robert Butcher, William Atkin, James Cammel, John Cooper, Robert Crabb, William Dan, John Pricke and Aaron Layton were taken quietly away before their families found out. It was a process Ely was getting used to.

This was too much. Pent up hatred gave way to raw emotion and fear of reprisal. Jonathan Page, a farmer who employed 150 men, and a number of Ely inhabitants – some of whom had been prominent in the fight with the rioters – tried to calm the situation with a protest meeting in the Shire Hall. They had the backing of Edward Metcalfe, the magistrate who had tried to pacify the protesters in the first place but he was overruled by Sir Henry Bate Dudley, the hero of the charge on the Globe Inn at Littleport. Undeterred the meeting was switched to a room at the Club Inn where resolutions were passed and sent to the Prince Regent, to the Judges and the Home Secretary. Tension reached breaking point, soldiers were put on alert once more. Weeks dragged on. Then fate turned kind.

The prison hulks were rotting, they were expensive to maintain and the Government decided to scrap them. Those on long sentences were transported, those on lesser terms sent home. Amongst them was Aaron Layton who returned to Ely at the beginning of June 1817. Having endured the unsanitary conditions of the hulks he found himself a victim of the cholera epidemic that swept the city 15 years later. Having survived so much he survived again and was amongst the fortunate few who recovered. He returned to his old job as a bricklayer – Pickwick could meet him to learn his first-hand account if he wished. But Pickwick had heard enough of the Littleport rioters!

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Pickwick awoke from a restless night of dreams of riots and hangings and to revive his spirits decided once again to seek out the services of David Adams, the barber. As he waited his turn Pickwick let his eyes wander along the buildings in this main, St Andrew's Street. There was his hotel, the Castle, an old, rambling, countrified inn with its wealth of charm. Nearby was the bleakness of the University's Spinning House, of which he had heard such graphic details, but between the two stood a solid edifice that could only be a dissenters' meeting room. From the style of its architecture and the newness of its brick it must have been a very recent addition to the streetscape.

David Adams was able to confirm his observations. The chapel had been opened only in the January of 1837, having been constructed quickly – though not without tragedy – James Payne, one of the carpenter working on building had been helping to raise beams of timber when a piece of oak fell from a height of about 28 feet. The poor fellow attempted to run away but ran under the falling beam & his skull was fractured in most dreadful manner; he died instantly. He'd been a sober industrious man who left wife and family; the congregation raised a subscription for them.

Adams knew something of the background to the congregation: "From what I've heard there were dissenters in Cambridge from the end of the 1600s – despite opposition from the more fervent members of the University who virtually demolished their meeting house. By 1720

there was a congregation of over 1,000 but once the old minister, Hussey, left the congregation split. The richer members wanted one person as pastor, the poorer wanted another. So they reached a compromise, one of them preaching in the morning, the other in the evening. But then the richer group exerted their position and banned the poorer's preacher from the pulpit. That didn't stop them; in 1721 some 100 of his supporters fitted up a stable and granary in a place called the Stone Yard in St Andrew's Street. It was a damp, dank, cold, ruinous, contemptible hovel but by 1764 they built a new meeting house with seating for 600 people".

The congregation had grown largely due to the efforts of Robert Robinson. "He was a Norfolk man, born in Swaffham; his mother was the daughter of a propertied gentleman, but married beneath her and was soon deserted by her husband. The boy was given a Grammar School education and then apprenticed to a hairdresser in London. He was up at four in the morning reading hard and was considered an eccentric apprentice indeed.

"Not everyone considered him odd: he found a wife who bore him 11 children; he moved them lock, stock, barrel and mother, to Hauxton where they crammed into a small cottage. He took to lecturing at various village chapels in the middle of the week but came into Cambridge to preach two or three times each Sunday, attracting crowds to his services.

"In 1772 Robinson moved to a rented house in Chesterton but then bought a home of his own, spending several years in improvements. He pulled down the back of the house and built a coal cellar, kitchen, pantry, store-room and three upstairs rooms. Then he turned to the grounds, felling timber, stubbing up bushes, filling in swamps and planting trees. After that he levelled and planted a mud-shoal as a garden and constructing a baptistery – far better than the river where people used to flock in their hundreds to witness immersion, climbing up trees for a better view.

"Now you might think all this was an expense for an impecunious minister but by now he had rich patrons in Ann and Sussanah Calwell of Trumpington. Then he attempted to found a new college, which failed, a charity school for helping poor ministers and another for the children of dissenters and but they failed too. So he set up in business as a coal and corn merchant and did well – but he kept to his old habits as far as his working day went."

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David Adams the barber continued to share his knowledge of the famous Baptist preacher, Robert Robinson and particularly his working pattern at his Chesterton home. "He'd get up about three o'clock in the morning and then ring the bell to rouse the girls for milking, then he'd go to the farm and wake the horse-keeper, but while he was getting dressed Robinson would be feeding the horses. Then he'd call the boy to suckle the calves and clean out the cow-houses. About then, every day he'd light his pipe and walk round the gardens or go to the paddock to see any weaning calves, then down to the ferry to see if the boy had cleaned the boats.

"His men never knew where he'd turn up next. One minute he be at the farm examining his plough horses, then cutting thorns, whip-cording the boy's plough whips, pumping the trough full, watching the hogs being fed, or examining the swill-tubs or cellar. Next minute he might be back down the river buying a lighter of turf for the dairy fires and one of sedge for the ovens and then getting them trundled up to the house. Come five o'clock he'd be back up the farm, and calling the men to their breakfast, cutting bread and cheese for boys and seeing their wooden bottled filled.

“Only then would he stop for his own breakfast – and I reckon he must have been hungry after such a hectic two hours early-morning activity. Then he had the farm to organise: sending two men to ditch, two to chop sods and spread on land, two to throw muck in yard, three men and two women to weed the wheat; set the carpenter to work and the wheeler to mend old carts and ladders – the jobs varying according to the weather and the season.

“By nine o’clock in the morning it was time for his dinner, after which he’d fill his pipe again, drink some milk and fall asleep. After a while he’d have the carpenter wake him up because it would be time to prepare for visitors. Up would come some cleric or other discussing problems like who was the father of the Celts, Gauls and Britons. And after all that he’d get washed, dressed and go to a meeting and preach!”

That would have been a man to get to know, thought Pickwick; but it was not to be, he’d been dead these 40 years. Still there must be other characters out there in the Cambridge streets; he strolled outside into the sunshine. The brand-new Baptist chapel building faced him and he could not help but wonder just how many other new buildings there were. The new Downing College and the foundations of the new Fitzwilliam Museum he had glimpsed on his arrival, together with that new Pitt Press that seemed like a church. Then there was the great disappointment of that initial view of King’s college with the great chapel so badly hidden by that hideous new screen. It was time to explore that building in more detail.

So Pickwick turned his toes once more towards the town centre; passing Christ’s college carefully, less he bump into his old companion, Henry Gunning, passing the Wrestlers Inn in Petty Cury more carefully still, lest the swindlers that robbed him night make a reappearance. Sam Welldon’s butcher’s shop tormented him – ought he to call in and see how the poor man’s wife now fared? He did not linger crossing the evil-smelling Market Hill – though catching a glimpse of bellman Isaac Moule in his distinctive uniform going about his duties. He continued along St Mary’s Passage to the scene of his greatest embarrassment and could not help but wonder if the passers-by were still talking of that occasion – was it only days before – when the stagecoach had lost its wheel and he had ended up in the dust.

But as he paused and looked across the street to the magnificence of King’s College chapel then it all seemed worthwhile. No wonder it attracted visitors from across the country – and from farther afield too if the strange accent emanating from the man beside him was any judge. He had never met an American – could this be one?

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As he watched the strange character who, like himself, was admiring the exterior of the great King’s College chapel Pickwick was more and more convinced that he must be an American. It was too good a chance to ignore. He doffed his hat and engaged him in some small conversation to which his new companion responded whole-heartedly. For Elihu Burritt – for as such he introduced himself – was also engaged in a journey to gain information that he might impart to others. But unlike Pickwick he was travelling not by coach – but on foot.

“I have resolved to walk the length of Britain, from London to John o’Groats; two nights ago I was holed up in a town called Royston – do you know it? It is the sort of place you could pass through with your eyes closed – and indeed that is just what one traveller did some three years ago. It was one Saturday night or Sunday morning when the driver of a stage waggon drawn by eight horses got too close to a sign post as he travelled through Melbourn. He was so sleepy he did not notice and the when post got jammed between the wheels and the wagon it was torn out of the ground and carried with them, sticking out of the side of the cart. Well he got to Royston, still without noticing anything and travelled down the street with the signpost smashing into shop windows as he passed –
House after house was ripp’d and torn

Plant pots and plants alike were strewn
And gilded names in swaths were mown

Some thought it was an earthquake, and others that the end of all things had come:
The windows and the frames are gone,
And all the house is tumbling down!

“At the top of the High Street the sign post and the waggon finally parted company and the sleeping driver kept on his way to London in blissful ignorance of the havoc he had wrought. In fact I don’t think he’d have notice if he’d fell down the cave – and you know of the Royston cave?” But Pickwick had to confess his ignorance

“Oh yes, they have an ancient cave deep beneath the main street . It was discovered quite by chance when some workmen, digging beneath a bench on which the women of the Butter Market sat, discovered a millstone with a hole in the centre. Dropping a line through it they found a deep cavity beneath and then opened out into a large cavity. Well the townsfolk thought they had discovered the site of some buried treasure and set to work to clear out the loose earth - in fact they had to work by night because of the huge crowds of people who kept coming to look, and getting in the way. Eventually after some 200 loads of soil had been removed they discovered a cave round the sides of which are carved figures of crucifixes, saints, martyrs and other figures. They also found a human skull, some decayed bones and the fragments of a small drinking cup. You get down to the cave by a set of steps cut through the chalk to provide work for the unemployed some 50 years ago. An old widow woman shows visitors round and tell them many a tale of the exploits of the people whose images are cut into the sides of the cave. Some people will have it that they were the remains of a Lady Roysia who buried two husbands and erected a cross there. Later she’s said to have built a little cell nearby, and then carved herself a grotto and then a cave which became a catacomb where she was buried. Others say they were the bones of a hermit. But whoever it was they’re not there now – the bones were taken away for souvenirs – I was shown one of the teeth, very firm and white, could have bought it for just a few dollars.

“And for a few pence I bought something much more valuable – a copy of Old Moore’s Almanack which, did you know, was first compiled by a Royston man?”

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The next day I again faced northward, and walked as far as Caxton, a small, rambling village which looked as if it had not shaved and washed its face, and put on a clean shirt for a shocking length of time. It was dark when I reached it; having walked twelve mikes after three p.m. There was only one inn, properly speaking, in the, town, and since the old coaching- time, it had contracted itself into the fag-end of a large, dark, seedy-looking building, where it lived by selling beer and other sharp and cheap drinks to the villagers; nineteen-twentieths of whom appeared to be agricultural labourers. The entertainment proffered on the signboard over the door was evidently limited to the taproom. Indeed, this and the great, low-jointed and brick-floored kitchen opening into to it seemed to constitute all the living or inhabited space in the building. I saw, at a glance, that the chance for a bed was faint and small; and I asked Landlord Rufus for one doubtingly, as one would ask for a ready-made pulpit or piano at a common cabinet-maker's shop. He answered me clearly enough before he spoke, and he spoke as if answering a strange and half-impertinent question, looking at me searchingly as if he suspected I was quizzing him. His "No!” was short and decided; but, seeing I was honest and earliest in the enquiry, he softened his negative with the explanation that their beds were all full. It seemed strange to me that this should be so in a building large enough for twenty, and I hesitated hopefully, thinking he might remember some small room in which he might put me up for the night. To awaken a generous thought

in him in this direction, I intimated how contented 1 would be with the most moderate accommodation. But it was in vain. The house was full and I must seek for lodging elsewhere. There were two or three other public houses in the village that might take me in. I went to them one by one. They all kept plenty of beer, but no bed. . They, too, looked at me with surprise for asking for such a thing. Apparently, there had been no demand for such entertainment by any traveller since the stagecoach ceased to run through the village. I went up and down, trying to negotiate with the occupants of some of the best-looking cottages for a cot or bunk; but they had none to spare, is the number of wondering children that started at me kindly at once suggested before I put the question.

It was now quite dark, and I was hungry and tired and the prospect of an additional six miles' walk was not very animating. What next? I will go back to landlord Rufus and try a new influence on his sensibilities. Who knows but it will succeed. I will touch on his true character as a Briton. So I went back, with my last chance hanging on the experiment. I told him I was an American traveller, weary, hungry and infirm of health, and would pay an extra price for an extra effort to give me a bed for the night. I made the great American eagle coo like a dove in the request; and it touched the best instincts of the British Lion within the man. It was evident in a moment that I had put my case in a new aspect to him. He would talk with the "missus"; he withdrew into the back kitchen, a short conference ensued, and both came out together and informed me that they had found a bed, unexpectedly vacant, for my accommodation And they would get up some tea and bread and butter for me too. Capital!

A sentiment of national pride stole in between every two feelings of common satisfaction at this result. The thought would come in and whisper, not for your importunity as a common fellow mortal was this bed and loaf unlocked to you. But because you were an American citizen

So I followed "the missus" into that great kitchen, and sat down in one corner of the huge fire-place while she made the tea. It was a capacious museum of culinary curiosities of the olden times, all arranged in picturesque groups, yet within any aim at effect. Pots, kettles, pans, spits, covers, hooks and trammels of the Elizabethan period, apparently the heirlooms of several intersecting generations, showed in the fire-light like a work of artistry; the sharp, silvery brightness of the tin and the florid flush of burnished copper making distinct disks in the darkness. It was with a rare sentiment of comfort that I sat by that fire of cracking faggots, looked up at the stars as they dropped in their light as they passed over the top of that great chimney, and glanced around at the sides of that old English kitchen, panelled with plates and platters and dishes of all sizes and uses. And this fire was kindled and this tea-kettle was singing for me really because I was an American! I could not forget that – so I deemed it my duty to keep up the character. Therefore I told the missus and her bright-eyed niece a great many stories of America; some of which excited their admiration and wonder. Thus I sat at the little, round, three-legged table, inside the out-spreading chimney for an hour or more, and made as cosy and pleasant a meal of it as ever I ate. Besides all this I had the best bed in the house and several "Good-nights!" on retiring to it, uttered with hearty good-will by voices softened to an accent of kindness, Next morning I was introduced into the best parlour, and had a capital breakfast, and then resumed my walk with a pleasant memory of my entertainment in that village inn

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As the two men, one old and somewhat rotund, the other young, fit and American strolled together along King's Parade so Pickwick learned something from his companion of the life and times of the Royston man whose astronomical observations had transformed the fortunes of the Old Moore's Almanack.

Henry Andrews had been born near Grantham in 1744 and before he was six years old used to stand gazing out of his bedroom window at the moon. He progressed to sitting on the village green with a telescope trained on the stars and spending hours making astronomical calculations. As soon as he was old enough he was sent away to earn his living, first as servant to a shop-keeper, then to Lincoln where he took every opportunity to make weather-glasses. His fortunes prospered with the great eclipse of the sun in April 1764 which he viewed from Aswerby Hall, seat of Sir Christopher Whichcote where his predictions were hailed with acclaim by the assembled ladies and gentlemen as more accurate than any other.

Andrews turned his attention to education, working at a school in Stilton, Huntingdonshire, and then making his way to Cambridge in the expectation of advancing his studies amongst the men of science in the University. But Cambridge was too noisy and full of bustle, so he sought somewhere more agreeable – which is how he came to Royston. He took himself a wife, set up a boarding school and diversified into selling books and barometers, thermometers and other mathematical instruments. Meanwhile his studies in mathematics and astronomy were gaining him more than local repute and in 1776 he published 'The Royal Almanack'. This led to his engagement by the Board of Longitude as compiler of Nautical Ephemeries, and, more famously as compiler of the famous "Old Moore's". For over 40 years he was its author and through his great talent and management increased yearly sales from 100,000 to 500,000 copies – though all he received in remuneration was £25 per annum.

Henry Andrews died in 1820 and was buried in Royston churchyard. He left his telescope on its brass stand, his globes, astronomical manuscripts, papers and books to his son, intending that they be kept in the family; they were not. But we do know where his wig went. Such was the esteem in which he was held that an astronomer from Yorkshire wrote begging to be allowed to have it and promised to wear it when studying to the day of his death

"I met an old lady living in almshouses in the Queen's Road – name of Sharpe - who used to wait upon him and she told me quite sincerely: 'Every thing that he said would come to pass, has come to pass', and if I had consulted his almanack I might have avoided the mistake I made when continuing my journey", sighed Burritt.

With a little judicious prompting the young man confided something of his own life and times. "I was born in New Britain, Conneticut, one of ten children. My dad was a shoemaker & cultivated a few rocky barren acres of soil, but times were hard and there were few pleasures. Then my father died and I had to leave school to take an apprenticeship with the village blacksmith – but I had more of an interest in Latin and Greek verbs than on the physical labour of the hearth. I would study late into the night, and in so doing ruined my health. I was not fit enough to labour and turned my hand – like Andrews – to school-teaching and store-keeping. But then I decided to seek better fortune in the old world. I found a job on a boat bound for Europe, jumped ship in London and decided to see what your country had to offer. So off I have set on foot, destination Scotland. What will become of me I do not know but perhaps – like you – I might make my fortune in writing up my travels – and that brings me to Caxton!"

Part 257

Elihu Burritt continued his tale of his epic walk from London, now recounting what happened after he had left Royston. "The next day I again faced northward, and walked as far as Caxton, a small, rambling village which looked as if it had not shaved and washed its face, and put on a clean shirt for a shocking length of time. It was dark when I reached it; having walked twelve miles after three p.m.

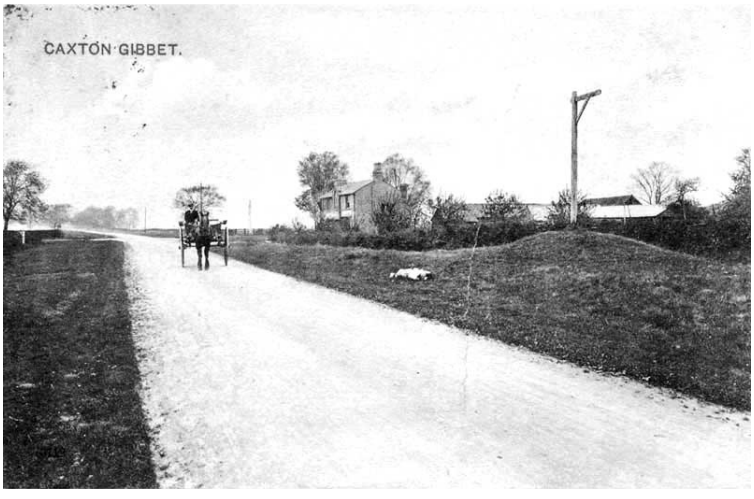
“There was only one old coaching inn in the town, but it had contracted itself into the fag-end of a large, dark, seedy-looking building, where it lived by selling beer and other sharp and cheap drinks to the villagers; nineteen-twentieths of whom appeared to be agricultural labourers. The entertainment proffered on the signboard over the door was evidently limited to the taproom. Indeed, this and the great, low-jointed and brick-floored kitchen opening into to it, seemed to constitute all the living or inhabited space in the building. I saw, at a glance, that the chance for a bed was faint and small; and I asked Landlord Rufus for one doubtingly, as one would ask for a ready-made pulpit or piano at a common cabinet-maker's shop.

“He answered me clearly enough before he spoke, and he spoke as if answering a strange and half-impertinent question, looking at me searchingly as if he suspected I was quizzing him. His "No!” was short and decided; but, seeing I was honest and earliest in the enquiry, he softened his negative with the explanation that their beds were all full. It seemed strange to me that this should be so in a building large enough for twenty, and I hesitated hopefully, thinking he might remember some small room in which he might put me up for the night. To awaken a generous thought in him in this direction, I intimated how contented 1 would be with the most moderate accommodation. But it was in vain. The house was full and I must seek for lodging elsewhere.

“There were two or three other public houses in the village that might take me in. I went to them one by one. They all kept plenty of beer, but no bed. They, too, looked at me with surprise for asking for such a thing. Apparently, there was no demand for such entertainment by any traveller. I went up and down, trying to negotiate with the occupants of some of the best-looking cottages for a cot or bunk; but they had none to spare, as the number of wondering children that started at me kindly at once suggested before I put the question.

“I carried on out of the village but there was greeted with a sight no man ought to glimpse – the stark outline of what appeared to be a gibbet. And if my eyes did not deceive me there was a figure hanging from it. I’d heard in Royston how the son of one of their innkeepers had turned highwayman many years ago, robbing the mail coach; and how he had been hanged and then suspended in a gibbet somewhere in the area. People used to walk out to inspect the body, poking and prodding to see how it was doing. He was left dangling there for some months until some kind soul took pity on him and the screw that held the body was filed off so the next a high wind brought him crashing down to the ground. But surely he would have been long gone by now. It might just have been my over-tired imagination, it might just have been some childish prank, some stuffed body of straw left to dangle there, but whatever it was I dare not pass it in darkness.

“I was hungry and tired and I could not go on. I could not endure a night under a hedge. What next? I decided to go back to landlord Rufus and try a new influence on his sensibilities. Who knows but it would succeed. I would touch on his true character as a Briton. So I went back, with my last chance hanging on the experiment. I told him I was an American traveller, weary, hungry and infirm of health, and would pay an extra price for an extra effort to give me a bed for the night. I made the great



American eagle coo like a dove in the request; all to no avail. And then I mentioned what I'd seen on the gibbet – and that changed things!"

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Too scared to pass the Gibbet as dusk was falling, Elihu Burrit, the young American walking from London to John O'Groats had returned to the Caxton inn. This time he met with better success; he thought his American rhetoric had finally touched the best instincts of the British Lion within landlord Rufus.

"It was evident in a moment that I had put my case in a new aspect to him. He would talk with the "missus"; he withdrew into the back kitchen, a short conference ensued, and both came out together and informed me that they had found a bed, unexpectedly vacant, for my accommodation And they would get up some tea and bread and butter for me too. Capital!
"So I followed "the missus" into that great kitchen, and sat down in one corner of the huge fire-place while she made the tea. It was a capacious museum of culinary curiosities of the olden times, all arranged in picturesque groups, yet within any aim at effect. Pots, kettles, pans, spits, covers, hooks and trammels of the Elizabethan period, apparently the heirlooms of several intersecting generations, showed in the fire-light like a work of artistry; the sharp, silvery brightness of the tin and the florid flush of burnished copper making distinct disks in the darkness. It was with a rare sentiment of comfort that I sat by that fire of cracking faggots, looked up at the stars as they dropped in their light as they passed over the top of that great chimney, and glanced around at the sides of that old English kitchen, panelled with plates and platters and dishes of all sizes and uses. And this fire was kindled and this tea-kettle was singing for me really because I was an American! I could not forget that – so I deemed it my duty to keep up the character.
"Therefore I told the missus and her bright-eyed niece a great many stories of America; some of which excited their admiration and wonder. My tales of the fighting at the Alamo and the slaughter of our heroes, Davy Crockett and Jim Bowie – can it be just two years ago – had them in tears. I told them of wagon trains and Indians, of the rich fertile lands, the searing deserts, and of outlaw towns where the gun is king.

"Thus I sat at the little, round, three-legged table, inside the out-spreading chimney for an hour or more, and made as cosy and pleasant a meal of it as ever I ate. Besides all this I had the best bed in the house and several "Good-nights!" on retiring to it, uttered with hearty good-will by voices softened to an accent of kindness. Next morning I was introduced into the best parlour, and had a capital breakfast, and then resumed my walk with a pleasant memory of my entertainment in that village inn – but not before I found out why at first my presence had been unwelcome and why my vision on the gibbet had occasioned a change of heart.

"About a hundred years ago there was a murder committed at the Monks Field in the parish of Bourn, but the perpetrator was not brought to account – or at least not at the time. However seven years later a stranger arrived in that village inn and, once his larynx had been loosened by the application of several glasses of the landlord's best ale, he let out just enough to excite curiosity. The fellow was promptly arrested, and when they stripped him they revealed a birth-mark which confirmed his identity and ensured his conviction. They hanged him alive on the gibbet. But there is more to the tale. A passing baker saw him hanging there, half starved and gave him a piece of stale bread. This was enough for the baker too to be hanged!

"And the reason they treated me with suspicion at first, and then liberally plied me with ale – well he murderer had fled to the New World, and now I, an American citizen had turned up on their doorstep! Perhaps they thought that history was repeating itself or I was seeking a lost relative. Whatever their reasoning I was glad of it. I passed that Gibbet in full daylight as fast as ever I could and continued my journey"

"I saw a sight on that road near Caxton that I have never seen before", confided Burritt. "I met an old man, eighty-three years of age, busily at work with his wheel-barrow, shovel and bush-broom, gathering up the droppings of manure on the road. I stopped and chatted to him and learned much of the ingenious and minute industries by which thousands of poor men house, feed and clothe themselves and their families. He had nearly filled his barrow, after trundling it for four miles. He told me he could sell his little load to a neighbouring farmer, but intended to keep it for a small garden patch allotted to him by his son, with whom he lived. It would keep him in touch with the soil that had been his life's work. But surely there should be something better for a man of his advanced age.

"Whilst we were speaking I heard the steady clop of a horse's hooves; as it drew near I turned to look; it took only a second – but when I turned back to by old companion I saw him many yards down the road. Obviously he did not wish to be accosted by the new arrival – as I then was!

"From his bearing and dress I could tell that he was a priest and he seemed most interested in my accent, which he apparently took to be Canadian. It appears that in April last year a Cambridgeshire Poor Law Union paid for some 60 local folk to emigrate to Canada, and he thought I might have been one of them now returned or else one of the families from Willingham, Over and Haddenham who'd left for America in 1832. Apparently people have been spreading stories of cheap and fertile land to be had over there and the fortunes to be made – which I thought was ironic seeing that I had just made the opposite voyage to seek my fortune here.

"But when he told me of some of the conditions in your countryside it made me want to return home straight away. This gentleman – the Reverend Frederick Maberly, I think he said his name was - had been curate to the parishes of Bourn and Kingston until three years ago, and said things were bad enough then – but that they were now even worse.

"In Kingston he'd known several families in abject poverty two years ago. A poor man named Jakins, as industrious and excellent a labourer as any, fell ill, and what did the Guardians give him, his wife and three children to live on – they gave him one shilling and four quartern loaves a week. The woman spent the money on three pecks of coal and divided the bread up between them. By the end of the week the family were starving, and the bread was stale.

It was the same at Toft when between hay-time and harvest there'd been sixteen men walking about with nothing to do. There were twelve more at Foxton where one poor labourer with a wife and seven children got less than five shillings a week – and some of that he had to beg for. But for the benevolence of the shopkeeper, who trusted him, some of the family would have starved. One Kingston labourer called Custance had been out of work for more than 20 weeks, another, named Blows, was driven to picking up the wool that dropped from the sheep in the fields – and this was all he had to live on.

“Even shepherds had problems. Maberly used to employ John Mole, of Kingston, and pay him twelve shillings a week as well as give him a harvest, the privilege of keeping sheep of his own and of shearing. Since then he’d been discharged by his new master and for 15 weeks no-one else would offer him work. But then a farmer comes and offers him employment at seven shillings a week, and without a harvest or his own sheep. Mole has no choice but to accept. But then what happens. The next door farmer goes to his shepherd and says ‘I cannot pay you nine shillings a week and a harvest while my neighbour only pays Mole seven. I cannot farm against him – and I’ve not done so well as him, so can only afford six shilling. And the next farmer turns to his shepherd …”
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Burritt, the American, related how he had followed the Reverend Frederick Maberly to Kingston: “He took me into the cottage of a working man – I would have taken it for a cow-shed or lay-loft; it comprised just two rooms with naked walls, bare brick and mud floor. There were a few rush-bottomed chairs, an old deal table, a simple fireplace with an oven beside it; a few pots and pans and that was the whole abode, goods and chattels. This was the home of John Mole, a shepherd. John told me how he comes home weary from his work, having eaten his dinner under hedge or tree; seats himself down for a few hours with his wife and children and then turns into a rude bed, standing on the further side of his only room. First thing in the morning – before daylight in winter time - he flings on his patched garments, washes his face in a wooden dish at the door, blows up the fire, gets his breakfast and is gone. “Sundays he shaves, puts on a clean shirt and a better coat drawn from an old chest which constitutes the whole wardrobe of himself and his children; his wife has some separate box in which to stow her lighter and more fragile gear, then he goes off to church.
“And this is the common lot of many a working man - supposing he is sober and industrious – that he is not a pot-house haunter, a gambler at a cock-pit or dog fighter, a poacher, an idle, rackety and demoralised fellow, as thousands are. It is supposing he brings home his week’s wages and puts them in the hands of his wife – ‘you take it mother, I have had enough to win it’. Of course his wife may add to the income by taking in washing, helping in the harvest fields, charring or so on, and they have the poor earnings of the children. His wages amount to nine or at most twelve shillings and if the family is large perhaps they get just about one pound a week – which is a sum other men spent on turnpike tolls or gunpowder for their sport.

“Now thanks to the iniquity of the new poor law system this poor fellow is being forced from even this squalor into something infinitely worse – into a monstrous new workhouse at Caxton that an unfeeling government has forced to be erected. Into a system that robs him of everything, and degrades him in the extreme. That takes away his employment, wages, property; it robs him of his home, of his parents, of his wife and children”

Pickwick could sense what was coming – indeed the fame of the Rev Maberly had spread rather wider than his area of activity. But here was a lad who had actually met the turbulent priest and, if agitated, might provide an insight into his character. So he decided to play devil’s advocate.

“What you must understand is that we could sustain the old poor law system; it had to be reformed. It was frankly too expensive; under the new arrangements the cost of coping with poverty will be reduced, taxes will fall and farmers be able to pay higher wages to their labourers. For want of a proper administration of the old law the masters stood in greater awe of their servants than they did of them. Your pauper was born and brought up under the old administration. He married and had a family in belief he had a parish to fall back on and at the last would die either in his own house - of which the parish paid the rent, or in the parish workhouse. The uniformity of new system, makes all fare alike – one workhouse, one dietry, one set of rules for all; the strong, the weak, the idle and unfortunate all fare alike. And the

new workhouse will give him better food than he has ever had before, there will be a surgeon to attend to his ills, a chaplain to oversee his religious needs …"
"But for this he must be separated from his own wife, with whom he has lived for many years – to see her pushed into one wing of this new Bastille while he is forced into another; to perhaps glimpse her just night and morning on the way to prayers! No sir! It should not be! We Americans stand for liberty – your government deprives your poorer citizens of their liberty, their independence, their morality and religion, and renders men like Mole even more degraded than slaves!"

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The young American, Elihu Burritt, had obviously been impressed by the fervour, drive and commitment of the former curate of Kingston, Frederick Maberly. And given his own problems obtaining a bed for the night in the village of Caxton Burritt had been amazed to find that he had been virtually on the doorstep of one of those newly-established union workhouses.
"Caxton & Arrington was one of the first of the new Unions to be established, back in June 1835, covering a number of villages around and about. The Reverend Maberly railed against it on moral grounds – it was tyrannical, unconstitutional, anti-scriptural, anti-Christian, unnatural, cruel and impolitic in the extreme. It encouraged homosexuality by segregating the sexes and promiscuity by redefining the bastardy laws in favour of fathers; it was an abdication by the ruling orders that would divided society and provoke rebellion amongst the labouring poor – but the labouring poor themselves took no notice.
"There were elections for the Board of Guardians with all ratepayers and landowners entitled to vote – only a sliding scale made sure the greater landowners got a proportionally greater number of votes. The new administrators met initially in the pub to appoint all the new officials that Government had declared necessary - a clerk, treasurer & auditor to do the paperwork. Of course they needed a Master, and a matron, for the female inmates. They needed a schoolmaster and a schoolmistress – for children would have to be educated as well as worked. But what about a chaplain? The rules said workhouses should minister to the inmates' religious needs – but this meant more expense. Church of England clergy would expect to be paid; nonconformists would do it for nothing – but what Board of Guardians would allow them to have influence, even with the dregs of society. Perhaps it would be cheaper to dispense with the Chaplain and just employ people to lead the inmates off to a local church each Sunday, all dressed in the workhouse uniform.
"Inevitably there would be the sick - there would have to be a medical officer – a first step on the ladder for any new doctor not concerned about getting his hands dirty, and he would need a nurse. They told those who were too sick or infirm to live on their own that they would be given new accommodation in the new workhouse. They learned they would be sleeping in dormitories, and separated from their wives – though at Cambridge there was talk of a number of family rooms when the new workhouse on Mill Road was completed. Inmates were allowed no visitors, except under most rigid conditions and supervision and although there was food it was a basic diet and they had to eat it in silence - oh and beer and tobacco were banned. What comfort was that for the poor frail members of society used to their independence.
"Those who were able to work but just could not find any work to do – as at Bourn where in 1834 there had been about 130 farm labourers, but work for only 100, or Barrington where there was a hard core of 54 men regularly unemployed – could apply to the new Union for relief, as they had done before.
"At Caxton they installed a treadmill to make work for 18 able-bodied men – but they found it difficult to find enough workers to keep it going. For the workers loathed it and preferred to work outdoors, even though the rules said that if any man found himself just one day's work in any week he was not eligible for relief. He lost the sixpence a day and the quartern loaf of

bread a week for his wife and each child he could have claimed and had to support his family on the wages of that single day.
"Then, once the system was up and running, the Government introduced stage two of their reforms. Now if you needed poor relief you had to take yourself, wife and family into the workhouse. You'd to give up your home – even if you knew it was only a temporary expedient, that there would be work for you in a week or two – by which time you had no cottage to come out to. Now people began to appreciate what Maberly had told them all along".

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In June 1836 the Rev Frederick Maberly started a campaign of opposition to the newly introduced Poor Law. Having practised on his own congregation in Bourn he distributed handbills and posters announcing a gathering for the poor and their friends on Parker's Piece. The Cambridge Chronicle published his letter outlining his views – and then inserted a false report that the meeting had been cancelled. Despite this attempt at sabotage nearly 3000 people gathered to hear the rogue cleric who kept their attention throughout his 90-minute speech.

Maberly rehearsed all the arguments as to hardship and gave local examples – how an old couple named Johnson had in the past been inmates of St Clement's Poor house, Cambridge. "The poor woman is blind and her husband has been her constant attendant; without him she could not rise from her bed, nor even walk across the room; every Sunday he was to be seen leading her to church – but now they are separated. The poor old man is carried off to one poor house and the wife to another to be thrown to the mercy of strangers, both deprived of every solace and comfort save that which the prospect of death may afford them …" And his audience listened intently and peacefully – which was just as well for he had told them at the start that he would be held personally responsible for any damage caused. The meeting concluded by petitioning both Houses of Parliament for the repeal of the heated new measures

Following this triumph Maberly called another meeting, this one on the heath at Royston, opposite the unfinished workhouse being built on the Baldock Road to accommodate 350 inmates. While he distributed handbills appealing for the local labourers to attend in their thousands the magistrates spread placards threatening anyone attending the meeting with arrest if violence occurred; and Maberly received a personal letter from the Home Secretary, holding him personally responsible for any disturbance.

But words might not be sufficient to prevent trouble. The newly appointed Royston Board of Guardians, meeting at the Red Lion, was convinced that an attempt would be made to demolish their new building. A deputation waited upon Lord John Russell, Home Secretary, and a force of Metropolitan police was despatched to Royston the day before the meeting. Then early on the Wednesday the Earl of Hardwicke, Lord Lieutenant of Cambridgeshire, several local magistrates, and a posse of police, took up their position inside the building to await the coming storm.

All through the morning labourers, women and children, continued to arrive at Royston from the surrounding districts, in waggons, carts, and on foot, and sat down on the Heath opposite the new building. On being questioned, they replied they "expected they had come to pull down the Workhouse, but they were waiting for the gentlemen who called the meeting!"

Urgent negotiations were called in an attempt to head off violence & Maberly agreed to hold the meeting a quarter-of-a-mile away, the crowd reluctantly moving back from what most thought to be their target. Then the heavens intervened, sending a storm of driving rain that damped the ardour of the 1,500 people who listened to the rousing speeches the incessant

downpour. The proceedings concluded with the clerical champion being drawn by his supporters through the streets of Royston in a waggon but the failure to attack the workhouse occasioned some dissatisfaction amongst the labourers.

The Guardians reported the matter before the Bishop of Ely, but in the general satisfaction at the peaceful ending of the affair, no further notice was taken of the event. The new Union workhouse was finished in September 1836, and was soon occupied by the drafting of paupers from the old parochial workhouses and surrounding villages; the battle at Royston had been lost – but there were other battlefields.

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In July 1836 the Rev Frederick Maberly's campaign against the new Poor Law moved on with meetings at Huntingdon and Ely. By now there he had an established procedure with advance publicity on handbills industriously circulated and distributed from house to house urging mass but peaceable attendance to a meeting on the common, usually on market day. At this week's venue flags were displayed and everything made ready. Then accompanied by a small band of followers the Reverend arrived in a cart - contemptuously described by the press as a "muck tumbrel"- sometimes accompanied by fiddlers playing music. After an address of some two hours he was drawn through the town on his cart and chaired before adjourning to the local public house. Sometimes celebrations went well on into the night and on his return after midnight from the Ely meeting "his vulgar taste was gratified by the ringing of the church bells". Despite all fears of the establishment the meetings stayed peaceful

But then came Saffron Walden where just before Christmas 1835 the old workhouse had been deliberately set on fire, the poor people of the town refusing to help put it out and shouting hideously 'Let it burn, it cannot be at a better place', 'Put it out yourselves'. A massive £100 reward had been issued for information on how the fire had started, and a Bow Street police officer called in to investigate the case – but nothing was found, though rumours spread as to a spirit of insubordination by inmates. The Guardians of the Poor however were shaken and granted concessions; men working in the mill were to be allowed to have time off over Christmas and still be paid full wages, whilst those in the workhouse on Christmas day would be allowed a pint of beer and even some plums for their pudding!

Then came Maberly's handbills inviting the poor to 'Meet me on Saffron Walden common at 12 o'clock in the forenoon to petition against the abominable poor law bill. Come in thousands, but come peacefully. Your peaceable deportment is sure and certain victory Our enemies are watching for this'. Special constables were brought together at the Town Hall ready for action but the meeting went ahead without incident. The Walden Guardians breathed a sigh of relief, the troublesome priest continued campaigning.

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Although the Reverend Frederick Maberly's opposition to the new poor law had so far proceeded peacefully – despite the heavy police presence that the authorities felt prudent to have at hand – his opponents took every opportunity to provoke him. He had described one incident to Burritt. "In July 1836 having business at St. Neots, I went over there on the market-day, wishing to circulate hand-bills, giving notice of the meetings I was calling, to petition against the Whig Reform Poor Law. As usual I took the handbills with me to put into the hands of the Crier to placard and distribute them. But the poor Crier, consulting his friends declined, through fear, to accept the office. I was consequently, obliged to undertake the distribution myself, for I am not easily beat off my purpose, as my adversaries have found.

“Thus I was led into the corn-market and there some of the reforming advocates of that reforming measure taunted me with ‘When will you hold a meeting here?’ I replied, I had not settled upon this, and feared there would not be time before harvest. It was then suggested that I might as well address them now. I said I should be interrupting them and those whom I wished particularly to address were not present. It was still said ‘get up’. So I got up on some corn sacks and proceeded, amidst much interruption, being in the midst of Whig opponents. When I told how an overseer had threatened to rob a woman of her child, a person in the meeting gave me the lie, and declared there was no such woman at Oxford, where I had stated the woman lived.

“On this, feeling the truth of my assertion, having it from the woman herself, I determined, if possible to mulct these Whigs. I therefore drew out a sovereign, and said ‘Sir, I will deposit this in the hands of the gentleman before me if you will put another into his hands, the two to be received by me or by you, as either statement shall he proved correct’. Upon this, my gainsaying friend was staggered and it was a long time ere I could get the sovereign down, but at last, by dint of perseverance, I did so. I immediately also declared, that I would produce the woman at the meeting that I then gave notice I would hold on the Thursday fortnight on St. Neots Common.

“This meeting I held (thanks to my enemies) and with an unanimity of feeling, and to the number of some thousands, so that my Market Hill friends slunk from appearing. There I produced the woman and her child. And the woman told the people, from her own mouth, that the relieving officer had threatened, as I stated, to take her child from her and not only so, but that he had threatened to take her allowance from her if she appeared at that meeting. Thus my case was substantiated, though it was endeavoured to prevent my proving it.

“But then a relieving officer, it may be the same, had the folly to make himself prominent, not only in taking down what I said - for in this there would have been nothing, for I court publicity - but in making derogatory comments aloud. The result was, the women made an attack upon him, in which, at length the men joined; and it was only by jumping immediately from my own carriage, and declaring that I would protect him, that I was able to save him from an untimely end”

Maberly needed to exercise his peacemaking skills on other occasions, once dispersing large numbers of people at Caxton when they threatened to interrupt meetings of the Guardians there. He carried on his defence of the poor, pressurising the Unions to maintain sufficient relief to widows, defending paupers in the courts and even breaking into a court session to appeal to the magistrate to order the release of a pauper held in the workhouse without his consent. But he was stirring up too many enemies, the Secretary of State complained to the Bishop of Ely who in turn accused him of spending too much time on agitation and neglecting his curacy. But by now he’d held meetings at most venues and could hardly go around a second time; and the labourers’ fears had lessened after their initial concerns had proved exaggerated. His campaign seemed doomed to failure. But there was more to come!

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The next chapters in the Rev Frederick Maberly’s campaign against the new poor law were back where it had all started, on Parker’s Piece, Cambridge. In April 1837 he called another meeting of his supporters, occasioned by renewed opposition in other parts of the country. Once more crowds turned out despite the now obligatory downpour of rain that seemed to accompany him everywhere.
“We of Cambridge and its neighbourhood stood nearly alone in our opposition to this abominable measure, now thousands have joined us from all quarters”, he told them. They would carry to victory despite all obstacles placed in their path. One such obstacle was the

Bishop of Ely who received a letter from the Home Secretary, Lord Russell complaining once more about Maberly's activities. The Bishop took up the complaint, threatening the turbulent priest with dismissal because of "the disgrace of having so dangerous an agitator amongst his clergy". Maberly wrote back: "The agitation I am guilty of – if so I am proud of it. I agitate to benefit the poor, not to gain power and place at their expense." It was a letter that was to cost him one of his curacies, but gained him support from unexpected quarters, even the editor of the Cambridge Chronicle declaring: "I do not recollect any other instance of a Bishop receiving his orders to punish the clergy from the Home Office"

But if there was any way of stopping the hated reforms it would not be achieved in mass meetings of the poor, it would be in parliament itself. In July 1837 came an election, and once more Parker's Piece was the centre of activity. The poor law was a topic of importance: "elect Messrs Knight and Sutton as your Conservative representatives and they will oppose the brutal enactments of this abominable bill & fight every clause of this obnoxious measure. Should the poor be continued under the iron rule of a heartless and well-aid Commission who have the power even to set aside the law – such laws receiving the sanction of the Whig Government who now the for first time, in the eve of a contested election, find out they are cruel and oppressive … "

Maberly himself could hardly have said better – and an impressive display of the new Cambridge police were on hand to ensure that only those entitled to said anything. The Mayor sent them deep into the crowd of onlookers at the slightest sign of more than usual agitation – though ribald calls, jeers, hisses and the like were of course an everyday part of the election fun.

Eventually Maberly could keep quiet no longer; but as soon as he opened his mouth to address the crowd he was seized by police and carried off with great violence to station house, they appearing ready to tear him to pieces. This so provoked Rev Mr Earnshaw, a quiet, respectable man and a University pro-proctor, that he protested mildly at the treatment meted out and was himself taken into custody for interference. The police exhibited ruffian-like violence – for although Earnshaw made no resistance his waistcoat and shirt were nearly torn from his back & the marks of the ruffians' nails deeply scored upon his chest.

Whilst violence to agitator Maberly was one thing, such treatment to a mild-mannered University official was quiet another; exasperated onlookers attacked the police station, completely demolishing its lamps and windows, even though Earnshaw had been already liberated. Mayor Humfrey – who owned the building used by the police - was forced to read the Riot Act before part of the mob dispersed. But the Police feared another attack under cover of darkness & determined to take Maberly to the Town Gaol on Parker's Piece for security. The mob however was ahead of them and ringed the front of gaol, defying the police to take him in. Then they rushed the police lines, rescued their champion & carried him in triumph to the hustings where he addressed the crowd for an hour before being conveyed to many parts of the town with cheering. But despite his oratory his politics did not prevail, once more the representatives of the Whig party were victorious – though now promising to reform any defects in the system.

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If Frederick Maberly had been a thorn in the flesh of the establishment before, he was more so now. To have been rescued from the very gates of the Town Gaol by his supporters and carried away in triumph was an accomplishment that had obviously invested him as a hero to the young American, Elihu Burritt.
But to others it made him even more insufferable. His arrogance boosted even more Maberly became even more outrageous. He forced his way into the new workhouse at Caxton and

demanded the release of a pauper. On being told the man was at prayer the Reverend refused to be denied, broke a window with his stick, kicked down a door – and then ran for his freedom after the workhouse manager called for the constable, jumping over the front gate in the process.
The manager, a brave man, charged Maberly with assault; this time the authorities resolved to have him. Out at his mansion at Wimpole Hall, the Lord Lieutenant of Cambridgeshire, Earl Hardwicke wrote to the Home Secretary and the Attorney General for advice declaring "I should not like Mr Maberly to slip through our hands again". But there were fears that magistrates would be reluctant to proceed with the charges and "it is not certain with the present state of Public feeling on this question that Mr Maberly will be convicted". To make sure justice was done Earl Hardwicke ensured he was the judge when the case came to court, and true to his principles found him guilty. But then even his nerve seemed to desert him and he imposed a fine of only one florin as compensation and £1 3s 6d costs.
Free once more the priest renewed his attacks on the system, pressuring the Unions to maintain sufficient relief to widows and defending paupers in the courts. Then in March of 1838 he invaded the Cambridgeshire Assizes and demanded that the judge intervene to set free Joseph Billings, a pauper imprisoned at Caxton against his will. His Honour responded that this was nothing at all to do with him – Maberly must take it up with the Workhouse Guardians; but Maberly persisted, ranting and raving until the High Sheriff intervened to warn that he would not allow such interruption of the court's business to continue. "In that case", thundered Maberly, "I will seek justice elsewhere", and stormed from the courtroom. But the church authorities had got him in the end; he was dismissed from his livings on account of an injury caused to a horse after one of his meetings. He bought himself a piece of ground at Chesterton – right beside the new Chesterton Union Workhouse. Obviously the world had not yet heard the last of the turbulent priest and his tantrums – and nor had Pickwick.

Tucked away in the pages of his scrapbook is a small pamphlet published some 20 years earlier, in 1818, in which Maberly had lamented the tragic death of a young undergraduate, Lawrence Dundas, who had been found dead in a ditch on Parker's Piece, his trousers around his ankles. That he had been drunk was undeniable – so drunk he had fallen into the ditch and been unable to climb out; he was found sitting upright in some eighteen inches of water. That he had been en route to the prostitutes at Barnwell was undeniable – as Pickwick already knew that such ladies plied their trade prolifically in Cambridge. But what was it that had corrupted this innocent fellow and sent him to seek sin in the first place – why, it was the disgraceful and licentious pictures exhibited the Fitzwilliam Museum. To show paintings of naked women in that way – did the University not appreciate the effect of such material could have on the passions of the most phlegmatic, even when those passions were cool; but upon the passions of those in the vigour of life they could be highly inflammatory. Did not the University know that fornication is the crying and increasing sin of the nation – that we are fast approaching the state of Sodom and Gomorrah. What possible good could such an exhibition do; it breaks down the barriers of morality, paralyses the senses and saps the morals of the nation. The University must arise and strive to root out immorality … Pickwick wondered if the young American would be such an enthusiastic supporter had he known of this side of Maberly's character; no wonder people condemned him as "eccentric", "unbalanced", even "mad"!
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Pickwick and his American companion, Elihu Burritt were nearing the grandest sight in Cambridge, the great Chapel of King's College, partially obscured by a newly-built stone screen separating the college grounds from King's Parade. Gazing up at it was a pensive young man – perhaps he could tell them whether it was possible for strangers such as themselves to enter; as they approached the lad seemed near to tears

“How could they do this to Cambridge; I spent idyllic years at that college behind us – Gonville and Caius - free, careless, gay days. Now I return to revisit my happy haunts and hardly recognise the place.
“I was here before all this change, before William Wilkins wrought his worst; this screen could have been a cloister – not a thing without use or beauty with that hideous Porter’s Lodge in the centre. His other buildings are scarcely any better. The Hall is badly designed; the lanterns admit no light, the two coke fires provide insufficient heat and to think it is less than ten years old – there’s a stone over the kitchen fire-place recording that the first dinner was cooked there on February 28th, 1828.
“A friend of mine attended a grand dinner there about three years ago, at a cost of three guineas a head. It was very elegant: all the fruit was on the table at first with dishes of jellies and what-have-you, with vases, & candelabra. There was a band in one Gallery, the music was good - though far too loud for comfort. And the service was terrible; without bawling & beckoning it was impossible to get anything but what was immediately before you; there was venison on the side tables, but the number of persons who got any was singularly small. And they kept the 160 guests waiting outside for so long that the Bishop of Llandaff got fed up with standing on the grass & went into the Combination room. There he waited a long time till at last tired out rang the bell & asked if dinner was ever going to be ready: ‘Ready, my Lord; why it has been served more than an hour & is very nearly over’. The Bishop – who loved his food - got in as fast as he could, & threw to the wolf in his stomach a few tarts & jellies, which so little satisfied him that he said he never suffered so much in his life from hunger.
“And for this the college sacrificed their old court. When I knew it in 1822 it was unpaved and roughly gravelled; the hall was panelled and painted with a central stove, there were just four tables for dining & one for hats and caps. Now the University have demolished most of the ancient structure, leaving only the old entrance gateway, which hopefully they will preserve
“This had been the original college, with the Chapel on the South side. Then King Henry VI decreed a court was to be built on the other side of the Chapel, but in spite of his most solemn injunctions this magnificent design was never accomplished. The ground stood empty and unused for hundreds of years – a scandal given all the houses and churches that had been pulled down to make way for it. Then about 1724 the college finally got around to doing something. They commissioned James Gibbs who produced a grand design with a Fellows’ Building of 24 apartments, each comprising three rooms, and another block like it facing Kings Parade. There was to be a porticoed Hall and Provost’s Lodge, buttery, kitchen and cellars. But only the Fellows’ building was constructed and the rest of the site lay abandoned for another century – things do not move quickly in Cambridge circles. Why even the foundation stone for the bit they did build had been laying around for 200 years – it had been intended for the same purpose in the time of King Henry VI!
“Then when they started digging the foundations the workmen found a pile of gold coins dating from the time of King Henry V. The college thought this was the answer to their problems, the workmen thought ‘finders keepers’ and most of the money disappeared with them! So the college decided to pull down the dilapidated old chapel belfry to raise some money – but changed their minds. It cost Henry West, the bell ringer, his life, for in 1728 he was crushed to death by one of the five great bells. It was another ten years before they finally pulled it down and moved the bells into the antechapel where they laid around for years”.

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Why wondered Pickwick had his new acquaintance not applied to be an undergraduate of King’s college? Henry Drury smiled: “I was too rich; you see King’s College is a college for Eton school, and Eton was founded by Henry VI for the maintenance and education of poor boys!

Eton scholars move on to become scholars of King's; their first three years are called years of probation, at the end of which the Scholar, if approved, is admitted to a Fellowship. The elections are made by seniority, without any reference to the merits of the candidates, though there is the form of an examination at Eton at the time of election.
Once they arrive rooms are provided for them, together with their commons, their dinners and a salary of £700. They have total leisure; freed from any care concerning the necessities of life they can devote themselves to scholarly research, or to doing nothing.

Almost all of them keep dogs and you'll see them with a top-hat and walking stick strolling abroad without cap or gown. Although they're obliged to attend chapel in college at 8am they generally find means of evading this "as it is so monstrous to get up every morning that that time". With nothing to do except attend a Greek or English lecture at eleven – and that for just a short period - they take on constitutional country walks, or visit a bookshop or go to the Union to pass the time before lunch at 1pm and then repeat the activity until hall at four.

In due course they become Fellows - and so long as they remained unmarried they can continue in quiet scholastic competence, most of them without duties, to the end of their days. Some do enter professions; become courtiers - one was king's-jester; others become printers, schoolmasters - and the masters at Eton are of course supplied entirely from King's - or singing-men – not that you would believe it if you attended a college service; the choir cannot sing and are negligent; some of the choristers are elderly. There's really only one choir in Cambridge and that comprises just six lay clerks. They hasten from the chapel of King's, to Trinity and St John's, taking part on Sundays in no fewer than six repetitions of the morning and evening services. And there is but a single organist who shares this almost incredible drudgery.

In time King's men turn into old, strange men – mastodons and plesiosauri, learned lizards in human form with caps and gowns. One lived all his days in a set of Fellows' rooms from which he never emerged except in the evening. Then he shuffled out on to the big lawn, with a stick in his hand and prodded with it at the earthworms in the grass, muttering "Ah, damn ye: ye haven't got me yet", and then returned to his rooms until the same hour next day.

Mind you the whole place is odd. The University Proctors have no powers over Kings' men inside the walls of the college. The Master is called a Provost and has all manner of jurisdiction within the precincts, including the probate of wills. Provosts are elected by college Fellows. In January 1742 after Dr Snape the old Provost had died three candidates were proposed and the Fellows went into to chapel to receive the sacrament and vote. They filed inside at noon but afterwards the voting went badly. Dr George got 22 votes, 16 for Thackeray, 10 for Chapman. There was no absolute majority and they needed a decisive verdict. So they stayed and reflected. Some smoked as they walked about, some began eating, others sat down or took a nap and then they voted again. But nobody had changed their minds, the votes remained the same. There could be no adjournment, so they had to stay in chapel all night. Some wrapped themselves up in blankets and propped themselves up in stalls like mummies; some lay recumbent with their heads resting on cushions; one wore red nightcap over his wig, his face lost in the cape of a rug, another had a chafing-dish to keep his hands warm. Others drank negus or brandy to revive them. Next morning they voted again – and they voted the same; but by now they were getting fed up with the whole business so came to a compromise; one man's votes were added to another's and so Dr George became the new Provost

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Despite all his scathing comments Henry Drury could not but sing the praises of King's college chapel – though even this had seen changes since he was last in Cambridge: "They've

carried out improvements and the floor of the Ante-Chapel, which had been of Dutch-tile interspersed with monumental slabs, is now newly laid with large square pavement brick; but it is the painted windows that contribute so remarkably to the interior effect. The window at the East extremity of the South side never was finished; because there the East side of the court would have joined on according to the Founder's design. But instead of that an old house was thrown up against it, which till the erection of the new screen served as the Master's Lodge. They really ought now to complete it, for the effect of the interior.

“The colours are wonderfully gorgeous, the transmission of the lights in different periods of the day and in different states of the atmosphere produces a variety of effect. When the sun is verging to the West the pavement is most beautifully chequered with various hues and sometimes the roses against the pillars are seen alternately red and white. Occasionally in the morning, the figure of Christ on the cross in the East window is so strongly illuminated as to throw the rest of the group into shade. And to think that all this glass was nearly smashed during the Civil War.

“Cambridge was the centre of Cromwell’s Eastern Association and many of his troops billeted in the town. It was a time of considerable terror; Colleges were broken open & dons thrust out of bed in the night so that their chambers might be converted into prison lodgings; what was worse their very food was taken off college tables to feed soldiers. Meanwhile other troops pulled down, demolished and defaced five or six college stone and timber bridges, and cut down the trees along the Backs, selling them off to raise money.

“College Libraries were ransacked, books being seized and sold at a tenth part of their value – thus depriving the dons of the tools of their trade. Soldiers plundered pictures, including prints of the 12 Apostles, and burnt them openly in the market place, proclaiming them the Popish Idols of the University. All this added to the natural hatred of the town for students who were likely to be stoned or insulted as they walked the streets until, frightened by the noise of war, many of them followed their professors in fleeing Cambridge for more peaceful places.

“Cromwell tried to restrict the worst of the excesses but the colleges, certain that if libraries were to be raided then other treasures would be sure to follow suit, decided to smuggle their plate out of Cambridge so that it could be melted down to finance the King’s cause. Cromwell had been told of their plans by some Townsmen and with a band of men lay in wait for the booty at a place called Lawler Hedges, between Cambridge and Huntingdon. But the Reverend Barnaby Oley, President of Clare-Hall, having got intelligence of Cromwell's plan, sent the Royal supply through by-roads, convoyed by a small party of horse, and after several adventures finally delivered it to the King at Nottingham.

“Then once William Dowsing started his desecration of religious objects in churches and college chapels the authorities at King’s feared for the safety of their great stained glass windows – but it was a group of choristers who saved them! There is a story that one night several ladders were fixed against the walls of the south side of the chapel and Waltheram the glass manufacturer and eight scholars, stripped out the stained glass piecemeal, packed it in hampers and buried it in the college garden. By morning the east and the whole range of the south windows were glassless. Of course members of the college could not help but notice, but they dare not stand and stare, in case people in the street might realise what was going on. Then as darkness fell the operation started again, the last windows were removed, several to be buried beneath the pavement of the chapel. I’m not sure whether the story is true, but there was one man who could have told you – Baldrey.

“Joshua Baldrey was a name well-known in Cambridge artistic circles for more than 30 years”, continued Henry Drury. “He had premises opposite the Senate House from which he worked as portrait painter, drawing master and engraver, and if any many could tell you about the windows of King’s College chapel it was him.

“For many years he was an oddity – one of the sights of Cambridge. People would see this strange figure in the chapel with a telescope peering at the details in the windows. But there is so much glass and the telescope only showed him a circle of less than twenty inches diameter at a time that he suffered from a very sore neck! He saw the glass and encumbered with lead work which held together the mutilated glass, while some parts were rendered almost inexplicable from numerous misplacings, but he was sure the glass had never been removed – except in the normal course of things for repair and restoration. All of it was incrusted with dust, some stained worse than others.

“Joshua was convinced that many of the designs were those actually specified by King Henry VII and got so involved that he researched into the contracts of the original glaziers: ‘That they would wele, surely, clenely, workmanly, substantyally, curiously, and suffieyently glase and sett up (or cawse to be glased or sett up) windowes with good, clene, sure and perfyte glasse and oryent colors and imagery of the story of the old lawe and of the newe lawe after the forme, maner, goodness, curyosity and clenelyness in every point of the glasse windowes of the Kynge's newe Chapell at Westminster’.

“He discovered the prices involved; ‘the cost of the glasse, the workmanshippe and settyng up” was to be “16 pence sterlinge the foot; and 2d. extra for bynding, with double bands of leade for defence of great wyndes and other outrageous wethers’.

“Year after year he worked until in 1803 he was ready to announce he would be finished in three months. But he wasn’t. He had many difficulties which delayed him, including the death of his wife in September 1806 and I’m not sure he did not go a little mad. He told me how one night he was locked in the chapel – I think it was about the time that Grimshaw and Kidman were undertaking their audacious burglaries.

“It was a night of a full moon and the light streamed through the windows. Joshua sat in one of the choirstalls and studied the glass – the one in which Reuben stands looking into the empty well, where he expected to find Joseph. But as he looked the stained glass figure moved - it sat on the edge of the pit! And what is more it spoke: ‘Well I suppose that fellar Joseph as took and gorn off on one of his larks. I thought he weren’t in that well’. Then it rummaged in his shirt and produced a murky clay pipe, filled it with tobacco, struck a match on the stonework and lit up. Joshua was terrified – he could even smell the tobacco, but he realised then what it was that had made the glass so stained and dirty!

It was not until May 1809 that he published his coloured engraving of the East window of the chapel. But brilliant as the engraving was it falls very far from possessing the brilliancy and rich tone of the original windows. You’d have thought he’d had enough but then he moved on to the North East window, and when he moved to Fen Ditton in 1811 announced that hoped to issue an engraving of the South Window as well. With all this it is remarkable that he had time for anything else but he produced numerous other engravings, some of which were used to illustrate the 'University Almanack' between 1801 and 1810 – you can see them in Harraden’s print shop opposite the college. He died in 1829, aged 74, leaving a widow and 11 children – one just five years old! By then he was penniless. Various of his friends issued an appeal on behalf of his family who were left in a state of complete destitution, I myself contributed the odd shilling.

Having heard so much of the wonders of King's College chapel both Pickwick and his American friend, Elihu Burritt were anxious to see it for themselves; would Drury be their guide? But no, he had an appointment with a friend on King's college bridge and time was pressing; but there was, he notice, a young man who might.

Turning, Pickwick beheld a lad of about ten years old, somewhat smarter than the chimney-sweep boy had been. Drury introduced him as Master Thomas Case, son of one of the servants from his old college, Gonville and Caius, and chorister of King's College.

But Thomas was not at all keen on shepherding visitors around, and anyway he was not allowed to pass through the main gate of the college – that was a privilege only enjoyed by the most senior of the choirboys, except when fetching 'Comby' from Crisp's

"Say, what's that? Burritt enquired, and Tom the choirboy pricked up his ears; that American accent was strange to him, but if there was one thing American's knew it was about pistols. And if there was one thing King's college choirboys appreciated it was firearms. The lad suddenly became much more welcoming.

"'Comby' is fruit, and Crisp's is that shop along the street", he explained. "You see one way we have of making a few pence is to run errands for the scholars and we expect an honorarium – sixpence is the going rate, though we don't always get it. But then" he chuckled, "next time we're sent to Crisp's we take the money out of the change – and tell the undergraduate that the prices have gone up.

"The shopkeeper gets a bad reputation, but greengrocers deserve it; the market traders pretend to be our friends, let us have fruit, sweets and confectionery and say we can pay later, many a lad runs up large debts and then that leads to trouble. A choirboy only gets a salary of 2s 4d a quarter for half the year, half-a-crown for the other six months, and our parents have to supply our clothing.

"When I first became a choirboy my dad had to take me to the hatter for a top hat and to the Bishop for my gown. That was my first visit to a tailor, now we go every year in December for a new one so as to be smart for Christmas Day. Mind you it don't do to go there in your best clothes because when all us sixteen choirboys get together there's quite a rumpus, especially when there's a new lad who's not caught the owl nor seen the blue rabbits!"

Now it was Pickwick's turn to seek further details. "I did it, everybody does, its part of the initiation ritual. Just inside the college Kitchen Yard, in King's Lane, opposite the brewery, there are the 'offices' – a right insanitary place it is too. The owl lives in the rubbish vault and you have to catch it in a cinder sift. So you stand on a step, hold the sieve over the sill of the door and then one of the lads gives a special owl-catching whistle. Only while you're standing there waiting for it to fly out some of the other choirboys have climbed up on the roof with a pail of filthy water. Once the whistle goes they tip the bucket down over you – it is a truly horrible experience, it makes a new lad howl and leaves him as blind and stupid-looking as the bird he's supposed to trap.
Then it's off to see the blue rabbits. They live in the Fellow's garden of Clare College. First you have to count the number of balls on the bridge – only I never fell for that one, I knew there was a bit missing. These rabbits can only be seen from the wall of the garden at certain times of the year. So you lean out as far as you can, one of your mates holding your hand – then he lets go and you fall down into the garden and can't get out, so you end up being caught by the gardener, not one of the most amiable of men. But I was lucky, he knew my dad, and I got away with it. Not that I dare have said anything, because if you 'budge' on your mates it's a capital offence – and one of them has got a gun"

King’s College choirboys were surely angels; angels did not carry pistols – but these ones did, as Thomas Case explained.

“Us King's boys are constantly at war with the Pitt Press boys, sometimes in single combat, sometimes in small companies, and sometimes - especially in a good old “snow winter” en masse. If we can draw the Pitts into King's Lane we can give them a warm innings, but the college cooks will not tolerate the row that these meetings cause. The Pitts are too strong in numbers for us to be drawn into Mill Lane, so most of our snow battles are of a skirmishing order. Then occasionally we have stand-ups with the Free School Lane boys, but when hostilities do break out the climax is decided between two champions, and the “mill” is either on Queens' Green (the Pitt ground) on Clare Hall Piece (King's ground).

“All this is good practice for when we join the rest of Cambridge on the Fifth of November. The other year the battleground was in the Rose Crescent, the one group coming in from the Market Hill and the other from Trinity Street. So fierce did the battle rage, at close quarters, with hard hitting weapons, that several on both sides were injured severely, and the next morning there was considerable labour and water required to clean away the unmistakable stains of blood in the street.

“The usual Fire Ball Kicking had been going on for some time when the principal parties were got in front of the Police into St. Andrew's Street, and slowly driven on to Parker's Piece. Here one of our lads was stationed with his pistol; loading it with powder he put a squib down the barrel and fired over the heads of the crowd. He was about to reload when he felt a touch on his shoulder and there was Mr Superintendent Titterton, ‘Give me that gun’ he demanded – and our lad had no option but to hand over our weapon. But what were the police to do with him; if they took him to the station in Emmanuel Road there would have been a riot – like the one with Maberley; they dare not put a lad on trial, and anyway the Provost of King’s would have intervened. But Titterton had the solution: ‘I will give this to your father’; and so he did, and that choirboy well remembers the consequent parental attachment.

“The Pistol was immediately forfeited, but was substituted shortly afterwards by a Bow and Arrows, and we practised in the Forest (what you call the Backs), till we’d shot most of the sparrows there. But there were a lot of them around and behind St. Mary's clock face so we fired our arrows there till we hit the clock and one of the Churchwardens caught us; the bow and arrows were confiscated and we got another walloping.

“That left us back on our old weapons for Tom Titting in Grantchester Meadows. We fill our pockets with stones from the gravel pits, and then divide up, one half on each side of the hedge. Any small bird, Tit or whatever – except the Robin (if we spot him time) stands a poor chance of escape with four of us on each side in the hunt. Its best chance is to get out at top and fly high, as but few of us can take a good flying shot, especially since we’ve lost our pistol.

“But the biggest birds we get are jackdaws and the best place to find them is above the ceiling in King’s College chapel, where they have their nests. Others nest on the roof and sometimes you can get the eggs if you reach down through the battlements with a couple of your friends hanging on to your legs – I once got four that way. One of the lads managed to catch an adult jackdaw in a trap and brought it with him to a service in Great St Mary’s church. We have to sit on forms beside the organist and they draw curtains in front of us, except when we’re actually singing the hymns, so nobody can see what we get up to. Sometimes we sneak out during the sermons and wander round Market Hill, or we go up into the belfry and have a chat to the bellringer. Anyway this lad was stroking his pet bird when it squawked and struggled and got away from him. It went swooping round the church, buzzing the congregation and quite ruining some of the finery of the young ladies. We were sitting behind the curtains, trying not to giggle, the preacher was trying to preach and the congregation scared out of its wits. When we got back to college the choirmaster went up to that lad, stood staring him in

the face, then took an ear in each hand and shook his head backwards and forwards so violently, not always stopping it banging against the wall. No wonder we need our pistol!"

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"But the only time we used the pistol for real", continued Thomas Case, the King's college choirboy, "we really got into trouble. There are two types of hunters at King's; us Tit hunters and the Undergraduates who hunt foxes. One particular day there was an accidental collision between the two companies' of hunters. We Tits were assembled in the gravel pit gathering ammunition when the noise of the fox hounds came very near, and upon looking up who should be speeding on straight towards us but Renard himself, and coming well within the range of our pistol. So we quickly loaded and fired, but the fox must have been too tired to notice such a strange attack, for be went on and got well away.

"We all decided in unison to make the quickest possible flight when the hue and cry, "Tally Ho" was heard approaching from the other side of the meadow, for at first sight we concluded that our unsportsmanlike action had been seen, and more than one very familiar voice was shouting. But they seemed not to have noticed and we escaped quick and safe from the followers on horseback back to Cambridge.

"Arriving at the schoolroom some of us took to one thing and some to another for diversion and evasion. The three leaders of the Tits got upon the leads of the roof of the Hall corridor which you approach from a window on the schoolroom staircase, or by climbing up the pump (a kind of grandfather clock arrangement), and got busy setting traps for the sparrows, or any, other game. Whilst innocently busy, who should come through the kitchen passage into the buttery court but the three "Red Coats" who as often not would prefer passing through the kitchen, but there they were, and the other three of us choristers could not get out of sight, but were making our way to the window for escape when one (and the biggest, but not Sampson) of the Reds, who, poor man, had a very bad impediment in his speech, shouted: "Ch-ch-ch-orester come-come down, co-come down, this way". This command was not readily obeyed, but his wrath kindled so alarmingly that he addressed me personally. "Co-co-co-come you down first", and seeing no escape I did venture down. All went well until I had my foot upon the old pump spout made it safe against a nasty fall, when, oh my, the crack of that whip and the query, "wh-wh-ere is that pistol?" could be felt, and heard, throughout the area – and not only by me but the other recipients of that long arm, for all of us had to share and share alike.

"One of the other Foxes was also a Fisherman, and for him and some others of that craft the three Tits were "cute catchers" of live bait in the fishing season. After our whipping things went back to normal and all went well until the fishing season, when upon one particular occasion an expedition was arranged for Grantchester, and the Tits, who were all things to all requirers, had half a day from school previous to get a supply of gudgeons and minnows. The former were mostly caught at "Stoney Gap", and the latter at a considerable distance up the "Brookland's" stream. One, with a novice for company, went for minnows (and the other two for gudgeons). One kept guard against the "Stoney Gap" bathers and putting in a hook as occasion allowed, whilst the other devoted his whole time to catch 'em alive.

"Next morning a start was made about 10 a.m tp the Spinney Meadow at Grantchester where there were some fine "Perch holes". Three of us choirboys accompanied the fishermen, one carrying the cans of live bait, another the rods and lines and dead bait (if worms dug from beneath the dung- hill at the College stables may be so described), and the third having charge

of the luncheon basket. Our leaders had a good time, especially when one landed a very fine Jack that had been causing fishermen great excitement for some time. Indeed they were so excited they did not notice that the contents of the luncheon basket had been somewhat denuded by we carriers! But then I had to carry back to college this captured, big-mouthed, sharp-toothed, finny fish, with a piece of rope through his gills, his nose nearly on my shoulder, his tail dragging on the ground. The fishermen may have been happy, my father was anything but when he saw the state of my black jacket and trousers, covered in the slime and scales of that fish!

(one of the Tits had a pistol, and the only hit from which, that I remember, was a few shots in a boy's leg which got in the way just at the time of fire)

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All this choirboy gossip was beginning to bore Pickwick; what he wanted was some insight into the more musical side of the lad's life, but he still had not fully won Thomas Case's confidence. If there was one way to a boy's favours it was through his stomach. There were two confectioners' shops along King's Parade, one bearing the name of Richard Edwards, the other that of Mary Crisp – this was the one that Tom patronised when fetching produce for the King's college undergraduates, she would know which was the lad's favourite treat.

On his return, carrying a selection of treats, including a bottle of that Schweppes lemonade - the genuine article with its red label over the cork & their name on either side, so beloved of Alice Bond, the washerwoman's daughter - Pickwick could see that his companion, the American Elihu Burritt, had succeeded in insinuating himself further into the lad's favours, and was now describing his impressions of that most up-to-date of transport systems, the steam railway, a mode of travel with which he was not impressed.

"Why", Elihu was explaining, "the train driver might be a hero for every schoolboy" – and the look in Tom's eyes was proof enough of this – "but he has none of the dignity of the stagecoach driver; he handles no whip, he is a mere extension of his steam monster. He wears no gloves in the coldest weather; not always a coat, and never a decent one, at his work. His face is grimy, and greasy and black. He blows no cheery music out of a brass bugle as he approaches a town, but pricks the loins of the fiery beast, and makes him scream with a sound between a human whistle and an alligator's croak. He never pulls up abreast of the station-house door, in the fashion of the coach driver, to show-off himself and his leaders, but runs on several rods ahead of his passengers and spectators, as if to be clear of them and their comments, good or bad. At the end of the journey, be it at midnight or day-break, not a man nor a woman he has driven safely thinks or cares what becomes of him, or separates him in thought from the great iron monster he mounts.

"And the speed of these machines confounds and swallows-up the poetical aspects and picturesque sceneries that are the charm of travelling in the country. The most beautiful landscapes, green pastures and yellow wheat fields fly by in a whirl. The views dissolve before their best aspect is caught by the eye. As for bees, you cannot hear or see them at all; and the songs of the happiest birds are drowned altogether by the clatter of a hundred wheels on the metal track.

"The farmer's house fronts on the turnpike road, and the best views of his homestead, of his industry, prosperity, and happiness, look that way. You only get a furtive glance, a kind of clandestine and diagonal peep at him and his doings; and having thus travelled a hundred miles through a. fertile country you can form no approximate or satisfactory idea of its character and productions. Where there are stately homes you get no vista, instead you plunge into some cutting or smoky tunnel.

"You lose the chance of a thousand little talks and pleasant incidents. You cannot say 'Good morning' to the farmer at the style, nor a word of greeting to the reapers over the hedge, nor see where they live, and the group of children that play by their cottage doors; nor

the little, antique churches, bedecked with ivy, nor the low and quiet villages clustering around. The railway affords no point of view for seeing town or country to any satisfactory perception of its character; no Tom – you travel by coach, it is the only way"

"Ah but we do", responded the lad – "we take the Union, all the way from the Bull Hotel to the Blue Boar; well it has to slow up for the traffic, so we have a game as to who can jump on the back and ride the furthest with our feet on the springs, holding on to the dicky. One night they hadn't fastened the luggage rack properly; I'd just got up when it came undone and down I went onto the road, I was dragged by my shoulders right along King's Parade, I thought my days were done. But then the upper part of my shoe broke and let my foot out. I got away with some bruises, a damaged hat, gown and jacket – and the most almighty threshing from my father, though whether that was for riding on the coach or for dirtying my new outfit I'm not sure"

And here the youngster glimpsed the portly Pickwick with his parcel, and that most welcome bottle of mineral water – with its red seal - and his face brightened into a smile

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As Pickwick suspected King's college choirboys were constantly hungry – especially out of term. But in this instance young Thomas Case was luckier than many, for

Tom explained: choirboys get an allowance of a Half-quartern loaf and one pound of cheese per week. We have to fetch the loaf from the Buttery on Saturday morning at eight o'clock - and there must be a good cause stated, and believed, before they'd give the loaf to anybody else. But some of the lads do not appreciate it; you'll see them come out of King's Lane carrying their bread in white linen bags, but as soon as they're in the street they unwrap it and play long-poults". And seeing Pickwick's puzzlement explained: "like marbles, you put your loaf down and others bowl theirs' at it.

"We have to get the cheese at Marshall's, Peas Hill, but you don't have to take it every week; the college work on a price of 8d per lb. and you can take it in anything that Marshall's stock. My parents are college servants and don't generally require any such supply of food-stuff during Term time, so I save mine until the "Long Vacation" or "Cucumber Time" and then whole Derby cheese comes in very acceptable.

Of course in the college supply us with a dinner which is served in the in the school-room, over the butteries. But you have to be quick to get any. Dinner is served at one o'clock, which is just the time school finishes. Should you get held up and miss grace you also miss dinner – and the more who miss dinner the better for Mrs B – the bedder – who clears the tables and keeps what's not eaten. Not that she gets a lot – we get a lump of bread and one dish – I wouldn't call it a joint – of meat; don't ask what sort of meat it is, we can never tell. That's why they supply plenty of salt, and sometimes mustard – and we know if there's mustard it must either be salt beef or what we call 'mystery pie'. Four of us treat ourselves to a real luxury – pepper. We saved up to buy a little box to keep it in; others bring a pinch of pepper in a piece of paper in their pockets.

We always get vegetables – always the same, potatoes and cabbage, sometimes the one, sometimes the other and on special days both! And on Feast days – two every year – we get puddings. They are very special days and we have to remember to bring our own spoons as well as the knife and fork we always

supply – and then clean them at the knife board in the Hall coal cellar. When I was a junior lad I also had the job of cleaning the carving-knife. It's all washed down with beer, about half-a-pint each, served in drinking horns; except there's not enough horns for everybody – and they make very good missiles, so it's every lad for themselves.

When term restarts I will be one of the senior boys and that means I will be waiting on the scholars in the College Hall. The youngest starts at the bottom, opening the door to let the waiters in and out; two wait at the scholars table, another two at the B.A.s and the most senior lad serves at the Senior Fellow's table. There are plenty of opportunities to filtch food, though sometimes you get caught. One lad the other year had just slipped a fried sole from a dish and was about to tuck in on a side-table when he was spotted by a Fellow who called him over. Well the lad was in a funk, so he put the sole on his waistcoat breast and buttoned his swallowtail coat over the top of it. Up he went to the top table – and the Don said: "I hope you go shares with your colleagues – you had better do so in the school-room". So he did.

But what they don't see don't hurt them. One Feast Day an old stout waiter was bringing in a round of beef for the M.A. table; he got up the first two steps all right, but tripped on the third; the beef slipped off the plate and rolled on the floor. That caused a right commotion – 'Pick it up boys! Pick it up! he shouted, in a whisper, because he was too fat round the waist to stoop so low down – even for a round of beef.

He blamed the lad who was supposed to have been at the door, but he'd been sent to fetch water from the King's spring, just outside the back gates, on Queens' Green and was struggling back with the heavy stone pitcher. Mind you there is plenty of wine to be had, providing you get to the table after the diners have left and before the butler beats you to it. And we do make up for the lack of puddings by sharing to any of the sweets that get left over. The scholars only get one if they sent out for it, and finish every mouthful, but the Fellows are so bloated and groggy they frequently don't notice if half of their pudding goes missing before they've finished!

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Now refreshed and replenished surely young Thomas Case the choirboy would act as guide to the wonders of King's College chapel.

But no! It was more than he dare do. Though a member of the choir he was restricted as to where he could go, and he would not risk the wrath of head porter William Rowe. Besides the chapel was no place to go to – it was always chill and excessively cold on a damp Sunday morning. When he had first joined the choir by the time they had assembled in the school room, progressed round the old buildings to the north-west door – and then stood an age waiting for admission – he had frequently fainted from the cold.

The chapel had a dignity and solemnity – and never more so that on the occasion of that greatest of funeral services, the one for the Rev Charles Simeon. Pickwick, who still recalled something of the details of that remarkable life in conjunction with Holy Trinity church listened as Tom remembered:

"I was just a young lad then – two years ago. The assembly in the Hall and Combination Rooms was a sight I shall never forget - the vast number of all Degrees in the University – the

diversity of age and demeanour; as we formed for the procession – and I was in the front of it, the singers going before. The slow march round the Quadrangle on that November day, gave the impression of a solemn pageant. Then the rare and imposing sight of the wide-open massive West doors, through which we passed with the solemn sound of the organ, thrilling and seeming to vibrate the very building.

"But what caught my attention was the gaping vault on the left waiting to receive the mortal remains of the man who had under-gone unspeakable scorn and derision at the hands of not only the ignorant and Godless of the town but of most of his fellow Universitymen (many of whom were among that assembly). Every seat was filled, almost every foot of the floor covered, every standing space taken – never could it have been so crowded and reverent.

"And once the anthems had been sung and the addresses given then I was one of those who descended into the vault to the strains of the Dead March from Saul. So I have been into the depths of the foundations and to the heights above the great stone ceiling, I've walked across the tops of the stone vaulting, peered down through the spy-holes on to those beneath. I've gone out onto the roof itself – there is nothing I cannot tell you of that building". But there was nothing Pickwick could do to persuade him to take them in.

And not was it childish stubbornness, for as he listened Pickwick became aware that young Thomas was appalled at the way people saw that great chapel not as a house of God but merely a sight to be seen, and as a source of income.

"Sometimes you will see a military man appear in the Chapel with his spurs on; that is not permitted, but it is looked forward to – for one authoritative bombast goes dashing up to him, insisting that he remove them immediately – and then demanding a fee for safeguarding for his spurs. Another source of revenue for some is the obtaining during the week of the orders for Sunday afternoon Chapel and giving them for a consideration to those who are not disposed to take the trouble of waiting upon a Fellow and asking for them.

"These Sunday 'performances' and 'parades' - I call them so advisedly, as they cannot be called Devotional Church Services – can be a disgrace. The stalls and other seats not occupied by resident members of the College are filled by those who are either personal friends of members or those who had obtained Fellows' written Orders for Mr., Mrs., or Miss Smart. One or more, I think not exceeding three, persons are admitted by one Order. No standing room is allowed in the Choir, but the space under the organ gets most uncomfortably and unseemly filled by the time the Anthem commences. Yet immediately it is over there is a general stampede, and the space along, with most part of the Ante-Chapel (where there are no seats, other than the stone benches round the walls), soon becomes nearly clear; only a few remain in the congregation at the end. There are but few who come into God's house with ordinary reverence and respect and many who come just for the entertainment. But, worse, there is at times a gross irreverence in the service. I have often heard conversations carried on during the intonation of the Creeds that would shock in a great degree. No, gentlemen, I thank you for your hospitality – and the food, but if you wish to gawk at the inside of the chapel you will need to do it at your own risk. I will not assist you. Good-day". And with that he turned on his heels and walked off.

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Standing in King's Parade Pickwick looked across the street to the imposing chapel of King's College and the new screen that guarded it from the street – entered through a gatehouse guarded by ferocious porter James Rowe Dare he enter – what was the legal position. Then from the corner of his eye he caught sight of an outlandish costume, a cocked hat, a dog and a bell – it was his old acquaintance Thomas Moule, the bellman.

Thomas, once he had expressed his delight at remeeting Pickwick, was able to offer advice. “There is no public thoroughfare but when the college gate is open then a Master of Arts can enter, provided he is wearing his gown, as may anybody with legitimate business in the college. You must at all times conduct yourselves properly – but you cannot guarantee that those inside will behave with equal dignity, and you might not get out again. Take what happened at Sidney Sussex college four years ago”

And here he commenced a remarkable tale. “The Master, Dr William Chafy is what you might call a character, not a pleasant character at that. How he came to be Master is a wonder – they say that when the elections was held in 1807 he voted for himself – and that was the only vote he got! But then in 1813 his opponent was disqualified from the post - having himself never been a Fellow of the college - and Chafy got the job.

He’s an arrogant bully and as he’s both Master and Bursar he dominates College council meetings. He’s refurbished the Masters Lodge, making it a fit place for the lavish entertainment for which he’s become famous – despite laughing at him behind his back there’s always people willing to drink his wine. He’s built houses in the Master's garden – and keeps the rents for himself, and others in Malcolm Street and Sussex street - where he so annoyed the builder with his demands for alterations and changes that the chap told me ‘I'll build as I like, for all the Master, the Fellows and the Devil’ – and ended up in court over it.

“Now the Master has a son who takes after his father, very disagreeable fellow, loudmouth, talks incessantly – and he’s constantly in trouble. Anyway in August 1833 there was some sort of hoo-ha and Mr Cannon, a solicitor who has his business near the college, was asked to interview the lad on behalf of a London lawyer. Now most people would have gone straight to the boy’s father, but given Dr Chafy’s reputation he thought he would speak to the son on his own. He went to the Master’s Lodge but was told that as young William was a Fellow Commoner of the college, he had his own rooms. He found the door and knocked, but there was no reply.

“A couple of days later he was going off for a walk to Chesterton with a friend of his, Mr Stewart who was an undergraduate of Jesus College – but a mature gentleman, with a wife and family. As they passed Sidney Sussex he decided to pop in and see if young Chafy was in this time. He wasn’t, but as they made their way out they came across old Chafy, the Master who yelled after him: ‘Who are you; want do you want here?’ Now as it was a warm afternoon and he didn’t want to get involved, Mr Cannon just said ‘It’s of no consequence’ and carried on walking. At this Chafy exploded. He turned red and roared: ‘I am the Master here and these are my territories. I will know what you want before you leave this college’.

“At this outbreak Mr Stewart was taken aback: ‘Really, Dr Chafy, I’m must surprised!’ ‘Don’t you Dr Chafy me. Stupid fools! I’ll have you know that I’m Master and a magistrate: I’ll send you to prison’. And he ordered the college porter to lock the gates and send for a constable. When Michael Bennett arrived, with his constable’s staff, he found the Master positively steaming: ‘I give these men into your charge’ he roared; and when Bennett asked on what charge, he replied ‘For not telling me who they are. They are suspicious characters; I’ve sent for another magistrate and when he arrives I’ll send them to prison’. Then the Master of Sidney Sussex College stuck his tongue out at them, looked as if he was preparing to spit, but stormed off to his Lodge instead!

“Everybody was dumbstruck – it was not the behaviour you’d expect from a Reverend gentleman - but the gate was locked and the porter daren’t open it. Meanwhile most of Cambridge had heard the ranting and roaring and crowds gathered, people looking out of their windows. After a bit another constable arrived, and so did Alderman Abbott with a group of several men. Now Abbott knew Mr Cannon – well as a lawyer he regularly appears in court – and Abbott knew Dr Chafy all too well. He went off to the Master’s Lodge to try and calm

things down. After a bit he came back out sent the constable away and everybody dispersed. And that was the end of it – or so people thought at the time.

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Despite all the dangers, Burritt the American resolved to visit to King's College chapel, but Pickwick had had enough excitement already to risk another bout of unpleasantness. However he must have something with which to remind himself of its magnificent interior - even if he was not actually to see it.

His eye was caught by a display of engravings in a print shop opposite the chapel; the name above the door read 'Roe'; he ventured inside and was transported into a world of wonder. The shop was packed with engraving after engraving, some plain, some coloured, some of buildings, some of characters, some old, many quite modern; and in the person of the proprietor he found an enthusiast anxious to impart tales of the artists and their work.

Did he want old views - if so those of David Loggan would be top of his list. Roe rummaged in a cabinet and produced a selection of large engravings looking down on the principal colleges that dated back to the 1680s. The artist had been born in Danzig of Scottish parents and that he learnt his engraving skills in Denmark before coming to England in the early 1650s. By then his reputation was established and when aged 27 he was selected to engrave the title page for the Book of Common Prayer in 1662. For ten years he worked in Oxford producing engravings of the colleges there but on its completion he moved to Cambridge

Roe had made careful study of the prints; "By minute study of the detail I deduce that the first engraving issued was that of St Catharine's college in 1676; it was followed by that of St Johns which was started in 1679 and finished nine years later. The whole set was published in a volume entitled 'Cantabrigia Illustrata' in 1690 when he left Cambridge and died in London three years later. The amount of detail that he crammed into each print is obvious to anybody who studies diem; he omitted nothing and die architectural features recorded can still be found today even if they have been covered by later building work. The foreground detail such as flower-beds, bowling greens and tennis courts give an insight into the domestic life of the time - even down to the dogs barking at each other in Trinity college court that annoyed the tame eagle kept chained there".

Pickwick raised ml eyebrow- in disbelief - but it was true. Despite college rules banning canines the Master did indeed have two dogs that the college council had reclassified as honorary cats and the Audit books for Michaelmas 1684 record payment for a perch and chain for the bird. "In all my research I have been able to fault the artist on only one count - in the view of Caius college he has placed a horse and cart, some men - and a dog - on land that was in fact a garden. But how did he get so high into the sky in order to look down on the colleges - well that remains a mystery!"

"But not all prints are as accurate. Between 1797 and 1800 a furious squabble between two illustrators was played out in Cambridge. It started when David Hood, a printseller with premises near Eaden Lilley in Shoemaker Rowand Richard Harraden a London engraver, co-operated in the publication of a view of Kings college chapel and Clare Hall which they sold for 10/6. But Harraden disputed that he had any partnership with Hood and accused him keeping the money; Hood countered calling Harraden a liar and saying he'd been injuring him in his business, creeping into his connections, reducing his credit and forcing his young family to ruin and distress.

"They patched up that dispute but in June the next year, 1798, Harraden announced a set of six engravings and then Hood brought out a series of views by Malton, 'an artist of superior excellence & better that Harraden's incorrect likenesses', although you could not buy them in

Cambridge, but only from Mr Fores' establishment in Piccadilly, London. Within two years they were being sold at bargain prices at just half-a- guinea plain, one guinea coloured. Richard Harraden and his son have continued to work in Cambridge and in 1811 brought out a collection of their work called 'Cantabigia Depicta' - but this has nothing of the accuracy of Loggan, and is indeed inferior to Malton's work. Now the old man is sick, but his son, Richard Bankes Harraden continues to run the business - just a few doors along King's Parade

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Perhaps, prompted Robert Roe the printseller, Pickwick would prefer something more colourful as a permanent reminder of his visit to Cambridge. Rather than invest in an original painting he might like to consider some of the plates produced by Rudolph Ackermann. His work was well-known, indeed he had opened a print shop in the Strand as long ago as 1795. There he had established a lithographic press from which he issued an astonishing range of illustrated volumes covering the Arts, Literature and Fashion.

In 1814 Ackermann produced a successful History of Oxford which he followed the next year with a History of the University of Cambridge, its Colleges, Halls and Public Buildings. The two volumes of text were accompanied by sixty-four topographical views in colour by a team which included Augustus Pugin, Frederick Mackenzie and William Westall, the finest exponents of their art. Pugin had escaped from his native France and became a draughtsman in the office of the famous architect John Nash, producing colour views of the mansions that he was designing before teaming up with Ackermann. Together, Roe considered, they had produced the best series of illustrations of Cambridge issued to date.

Pickwick browsed through views of the buildings largely unchanged over the past 24 years & was especially captivated by the incidental details, especially in those depicting river activity between Magdalene and Silver street bridges. His memory went back to that memorable voyage with Will Spread, just a day or so before. Indeed it might even be his friend shown at St Johns college using his pole to push the barges into mid-stream, the mast on the lead boat lowered in anticipation of the first of the college bridges that obstructed his passage. And was that not indeed his very barge unloading its cargo in the Mill Pool. Several of the coloured engravings found their way into Pickwick's papers.

Roe tried to interest him in an illustrated history of the University and Colleges of Cambridge issued in 1814 by George Dyer, who he described as a man of singular simplicity & kindness but with a total absence of humour. When he had sat down to write his monumental work he deliberately shut himself away from his friends to concentrate on his task. But just as he thought he was getting to the end he was struck down by illness leaving his papers everywhere. By the time he recovered they were scattered totally, some hidden between the pages of books he was checking - but which ones - and it was a case of starting again. It took three years to complete the two-volume, 700-page work. Even so he could have written more save for his conviction that "when men's memories do arise it is time for history to go to bed" and he deliberately refrained from mentioning anybody he had known during his University career. He also omitted to talk to the artist who was commissioned to produce the plates, John Greig, so that, although they were executed with faithfulness and taste they did not exactly match the text.

Pickwick had experience of such problems; he told Rowe how when his own book was in production he had commissioned an illustrator to produce the engravings, only to have him fail through technical difficulties and had to bring in Hablot Browne – 'Phiz' to complete the work. Now, Roe said, there were rumours that the original illustrator, Robert Buss, was considering turning his skills on Cambridge.

He would have stiff competition; there was the father and son team of James and Henry Storer. James had been born in Cambridge in 1771 and made his name drawing and engraving scenes of Old England with the aforementioned John Greig. They published views of London, a description of Fonthill Abbey and produced some 500 plates to illustrate 'The Antiquarian & Topographical Cabinet' issued between 1807 & 1811. When the young Henry Storer had reached his 19th birthday in 1814 father and son had gone into partnership. The first fruits of their collaboration were four volumes on the Cathedrals of Great Britain that had been hailed as the most accurate views of these buildings in existence. Then they turned their attention to Cambridge and in November 1827 published their first four plates, including scenes of Corpus Christi college & St Botolph's church. Although the incidental details - a stagecoach waiting at the corner of Silver street & strolling undergraduates - seemed somehow stilted the accuracy of the buildings was not to be faulted and father & son took up residence in Cambridge to ensure their reputation remained untarnished. Their last work was devoted to college gateways and was issued when the elder Storer was 66. Then tragically Henry died in 1837 and was buried in St James' chapel, Pentonville. His father was heartbroken. "He stood where you are and told me 'I have not attended to my profession since that time; my graver has lost its point; never to be renewed'" I fear it is the last we shall see of his work". But of course it did add to the value – and the price of their engravings.

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As Pickwick was discovering there were a wealth of engravings of almost contemporary Cambridge to be found in Robert Roe's printshop on King's Parade. Some engravers had already been recognised for their craftsmanship, their work would surely appreciate in value.

It was harder to judge the merits of the two most recent additions to the genre. The Rev J.J. Smith, Dean of Gonville and Caius claimed Cambridge was 'one of the irregular and ill-built towns in the land'. Yet he was preparing to publish a part-work to be entitled 'The Cambridge Portfolio', the first edition of which was planned to be available by Christmas.

Smith's plan, as he had outlined to Roe, was to encourage visitors by emphasising the better sights, and prevent their eyes from roving where it would not only meet with no satisfaction but with certain offence. He had been looking around for people to illustrate his book and two of those he found were Joseph Ince and Benjamin Armstrong.

Armstrong was an undergraduate at Caius College, a young man intending to make his career in the church but in the meantime willing to venture off the beaten track to find scenes to interest him. Roe had been shown woodcuts of such diverse sights as the gas works chimney, Barnwell, a signpost on the St Neot's road & Trumpington windmill – though he'd only included three of its sails, and Roe was sure there had been four last time he went that way. He had no criticism however of a delightful panorama over Cambridge from the Madingley Road with its picturesque windmill in the foreground.

Smith's major illustrator was however Joseph Murray Ince, a Welshman well-known in artistic circles having exhibited at the Royal Academy in 1826. He had been in Cambridge for some six years and his work was much appreciated. Smith had commissioned him to produce a range of engravings of both town and gown, exteriors and interiors. For months recently he had been seen in college court and on street corner. Even his views cannot disguise something of the shabbiness of the streets - the Round Church glimpsed above the high surrounding wall, the scene around Hobson's Conduit on Market Hill with the advertising slogans for Proctors cheap waterproof hat warehouse and the ale house sign on the Guildhall. His view of the Wrestler's Inn in Petty Cury took him hours to complete - he had been sketching the other day when some unsuspecting visitor had been cheated of his wealth by a well-known pair of villains at the Inn. The sight of the unfortunate podgy victim deep in despair had been so touching – and yet so funny – that it had been told time and again around

the town. There was even some rumours that the dispossessed was a London gentleman whose recently-published literary efforts were themselves being greeted with some humour – though whether readers were laughing at him or with him Roe could not discover. Pickwick blanched at the thought that his stupidity at being so comprehensively hoodwinked was being so noised abroad; he considered giving his side of the story, and reporting how the robbers had met their match – but decided it was better for the moment to keep silent.

Smith was planning to supplement the illustrations by essays on various topics such as the walks & the botanical gardens, together with aspects of University life like the visit of the Duke of Wellington in 1835 – and had commissioned some of his old students to pen them. Indeed one such had called into the shop just a few minutes ago looking for prints by Joshua Baldry - a young man previously at Caius, called Henry Drury. Pickwick recognised him as the gentleman he had been speaking to earlier that morning.

Meanwhile Richard Newby, a printseller in Trinity street had in 1827 invited subscriptions for a series of views of the public buildings of' Cambridge. He'd combined the architectural draughtsmanship of F. Mackenzie "as perfect as the almost unsurpassable state of art will permit" with the engraving skill of John Le Keux to produce views "with a stamp of pre-eminence which will be a passport to the portfolio of the most fastidious collector". The idea had been backed by William Wilkins, the architect of much of the new buildings in progress who made his own detailed working drawings available & also undertaken to buy the originals of each print, thus lessening the publisher's financial burden. The engravings, each 18 x 12 inches had been published at about six-monthy intervals for ten years and were now being used, much reduced in a part-work entitled 'Memorials of Cambridge', with a text by two Cambridge academics. It was up to Pickwick which he chose to collect – though neither could surpass the University's own contribution to the printsellers' profits.

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As Pickwick continued to explore the contents of Robert Roe's printshop on King's Parade he became increasingly aware of a large number of large engravings published by Cambridge University itself, apparently as some sort of Almanack. Roe was quick to explain that they had been issued since the first year of the present century and that the early views had featured the work of Joshua Baldrey – most famed for his work in King's college chapel - though in later years other engravers had been commissioned. They formed an official calendar, incorporating details of University activities – though most people merely chopped off this somewhat dull information and framed the prints themselves.

Pickwick recognised several of the scenes – there was the court at Peterhouse where he had occurred the wrath of the gardener, that was Christ's – he really ought to return and remeet his benefactor, Henry Gunning. The bridge of St John's college he recalled from his barge trip, and Jesus was where he had learned of the low-life who inhabited cellars not far from where he now stood. But there was one scene he could not recognised – a large stone Doric building looking like a cross between the new Downing college and an oriental mosque surrounded by a colony of mushroom-like domes.

This, he was informed, was the new University Observatory, established in 1823 on the Madingley Road,.

Funding for astronomical observations had first been offered in the early 1700s by a Dr Plume, and Pickwick would have seen the site of the first observatory – it had been built on top of the King's gate of Trinity College. This was never an ideal site – the great gate of St John's, or the Gate of Virtue at Caius would have been much better - but the then master, Richard Bentley was determined to have it at Trinity, together and the prestige that went with it. He poured money into the observatory that should have been spent elsewhere, just one his

grandiose projects that saw college dons try on more than one occasion to get him removed from his position. Indeed the site was better suited for illumination and fireworks than serious observation of the stars, and it was seldom used. When it did come into operation during a solar eclipse in 1715, so many people crowded into the incomplete observatory that the astronomer missed the start of the eclipse and forgot to time the period of total darkness. By the time it was finally completed in 1737 Bentley's claims that it would be "the commodiousest building for that use in Christendom", were exposed as false and within 60 years the observatory and its instruments were so dilapidated and disused that it was taken down.

By then there was a rival on top of the Shrewsbury tower of the adjoining college of St John's. It had been largely funded not through the generosity of any eminent personage but by a Mr Dunthorne who had spent most of his life as a butler at Pembroke college. It was equipped with various telescopes and a mark was made on the tracery of the battlements of King's college chapel to serve as a south meridian point, while two dots on the wall of a house in Bridge Street marked due north. But trying to maintain accurate observations of the skies from the centre of a bustling town was never ideal – especially when for much of the year the sky was cloaked in damp fog or acrid smoke from the numerous college chimneys.

So in 1822 the University had promoted an Act of Parliament to authorise the purchase of ground for a proper observatory near the gravel pits on Madingley Road – that just happened to be on land owned by St John's college. It would be high enough to have an unobstructed view in any direction. The precise spot was surveyed so that the tower of Grantchester church could be used as southern marker.

A committee set out to seek advice and suggestions as to just what was needed – even looking at plans for an observatory being erected at the Cape of Good Hope. They invited designs and tenders, finally selecting contractors who came in somewhat below the anticipated cost of £8,800. But when work finally got underway it was realised that some changes were needed to the specification, a few additions and alterations to the dome, some amendments to the layout of the grounds. By the time the final bill came in it was found that costs had soared from under £9,000 to over £19,000! At least they had got something worthwhile for their money with visiting astronomers declaring it better adapted to its purpose than any similar building in Europe. Indeed Roe himself had been invited to visit and been shown Venus – like a crescent and Saturn with its rings

But there was no money for additional buildings, so here the Duke of Northumberland, High Steward of the University, had stepped in with some investment of his own and presented a magnificent telescope of nearly 12 inches aperture – one of the biggest ever made - which was shortly to be installed.

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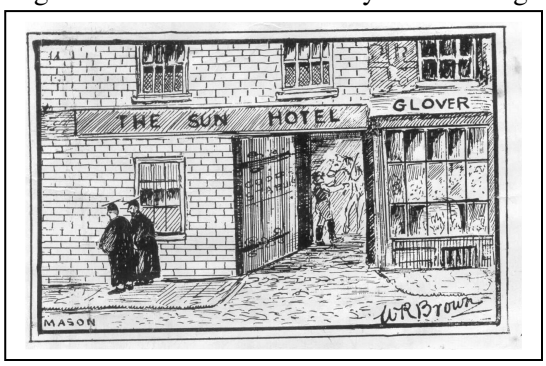
Pickwick's peaceful printshop perusal was interrupted by the arrival of a somewhat noisy, cocksure, young man demanding to know of Roe whether he had been successful in obtaining an engraving for him. It had indeed been procured and Pickwick had no choice but to admire it

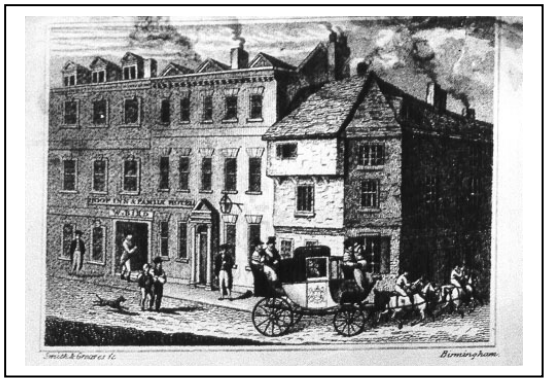
The scene was of no stately college or verdant pasture. Instead it almost screamed noise and bustle. It purported to depict Sidney Street, Cambridge in August 1830, after Lord Francis Godolphin Osborne and Henry John Adeane had been elected Members of Parliament for the

county of Cambridge. The narrow street was crowed, people cheered but their voices were drowned by the discordant sound of a band of music, bugles, fife, drum. From windows and rooftops jubilant supporters waved handkerchiefs and flags as the successful candidates were paraded in decorated chairs, acknowledging their greetings.

But all this had been eight years earlier, whatever interest could it be to the young man who had made such an effort to acquire it. It did not need too much prompting to find out. "Just look at those flags – in the run-up to an election you need about 50 flags like that; every one has to be bought and paid for. Every flag needs men to carry them – and them men need paying – ten-bob a day is the going rate for being out between 10am and 4pm. But then every flag needs to be protected – and them men need paying too – five-bob apiece. Somebody has got to find those men – and you're talking about 200 men who know how to handle themselves in an altercation with the opposing party.



"As well as flags you need election posters – and that's a good source of income for a printer. You need men to put the posters up, and night-watchmen to make sure they're not torn down in the dark. They're not the sort of people who'll have a vote – but they'll be recommended for the job by them that do. It will be one way that a tradesman can repay a good customer of his – to promise to put his name forward for a nice little earner.



"Now when you get an election each of the two parties will need a headquarters; the Conservatives go to the Sun Hotel, the Liberals to the Hoop, and these inns will be very busy in the run up to the vote. One thing you can be sure of, electioneering is very thirsty work, and nobody notices too much if the landlord increases his prices – well most of the beer drunk is free as far as the drinker is concerned. Not just in the main inns. Right round town there's free beer to be had, courtesy of the party, just to encourage the voters to see things their way. You give out refreshment cards and the landlords take them in place of money. Of course sometimes a chap will take a beer voucher but then arrange with the publican to exchange it for cash.

"Other tradesmen will also speculate. They'll give their customers free beer, or put on a supper on behalf of the party, then make an application to Naylor at the Cambridge Chronicle offices. I tell them 'don't make it too stiff' – make it out for 36/- and like as not he'll give you two sovereigns and not want any change. But if you're in it in a bigger way, like me, you need to watch out. They'll sometimes be a bit slow on paying out, and instead of making the £50 you expect, you can easy find yourself out of pocket.

"Now a few years ago the Conservative cause was pretty secure here in Cambridge. Well we'd got the backing of the University. They provide most of the work in town, one way or another. Lots of the voters are college servants, many of the others are tradesmen who depend on being registered to supply goods and services to the undergraduates. So in the run-up too an election the Master or the Bursar would sent out a messenger to remind people how disappointed they'd be if they found out they'd voted the wrong way. Lots of people I know – shoemakers, gardeners, lodging house keepers – would be visited, so we were sure of their vote. For many years we were certain no one connected with Peterhouse or St Johns would ever venture to vote for the Liberals.

“But then three years ago some of the college masters and professors – including Sedgwick, Henslow, Gunning and Romilly – started to get agitated about it, saying how they regarded the ‘elective franchise as a sacred trust’ and how such persuasions weren’t right. You ask me and it’s gone the other way now. It’s the Deputy-Masters and under-Bursars who back the Whig cause that are putting the pressure on to get people to vote their way. Others want to do away with the complete voting system; they talk about this secret ballot, with people putting a cross on a piece of paper. It will never work! How many people do you know who can read well enough to know what they’d have to do! If it ever does come in it’ll make my job harder, that’s for sure.

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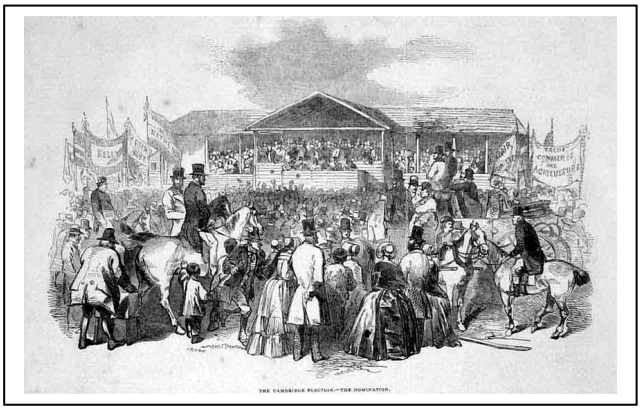
Pickwick was of course well acquainted with the intricacies of parliament elections – he had written of the Eatanswill contest in his own “Papers”- but here was a young man who seemed intent in making a career in such political manipulation.



Samuel Long was happy to outline his thoughts on the matter. “You know how the system works – the same here as anywhere. Come the day of the election then everyone goes to Parker’s Piece and after the four candidates have made their speeches the Mayor calls for a show of hands in the usual manner, as to them that support this party, them that support the other. He’ll then say something like ‘It is my opinion that the show of hands favours Rice & Pryme’. Then they’ll always be a demonstration of surprise and remonstrance against such a most unfair decision and someone will demand a poll.

“So next day they’ll erect the hustings on Parker’s Piece and all those with votes will turn up and say who they want to vote for. Now its part of my job to make sure that our supporters are crowded in the front of the voting platform and cheer like mad those who declare for us, and boo them that don’t. They make such a noise that it sometimes interrupts your concentration, ‘cos a couple of us are there in earshot taking down the voters name and how they’ve voted, which we analyse. The last election was nearly equal from the opening of the vote at 8 am for the first three hours, but then the Whigs started to gain ground. So we had to round up any of our supporters that haven’t voted yet. Now some of them that are politically aware know that as it gets later in the day then we’ll be getting more anxious to get as many votes as possible. Some will try and persuade me that they could be made to see things my way, if only I’d try a little harder. But if they leave it too late and it’s obvious that we can’t make up the votes in time, then they cut their own throats and don’t get nothing.

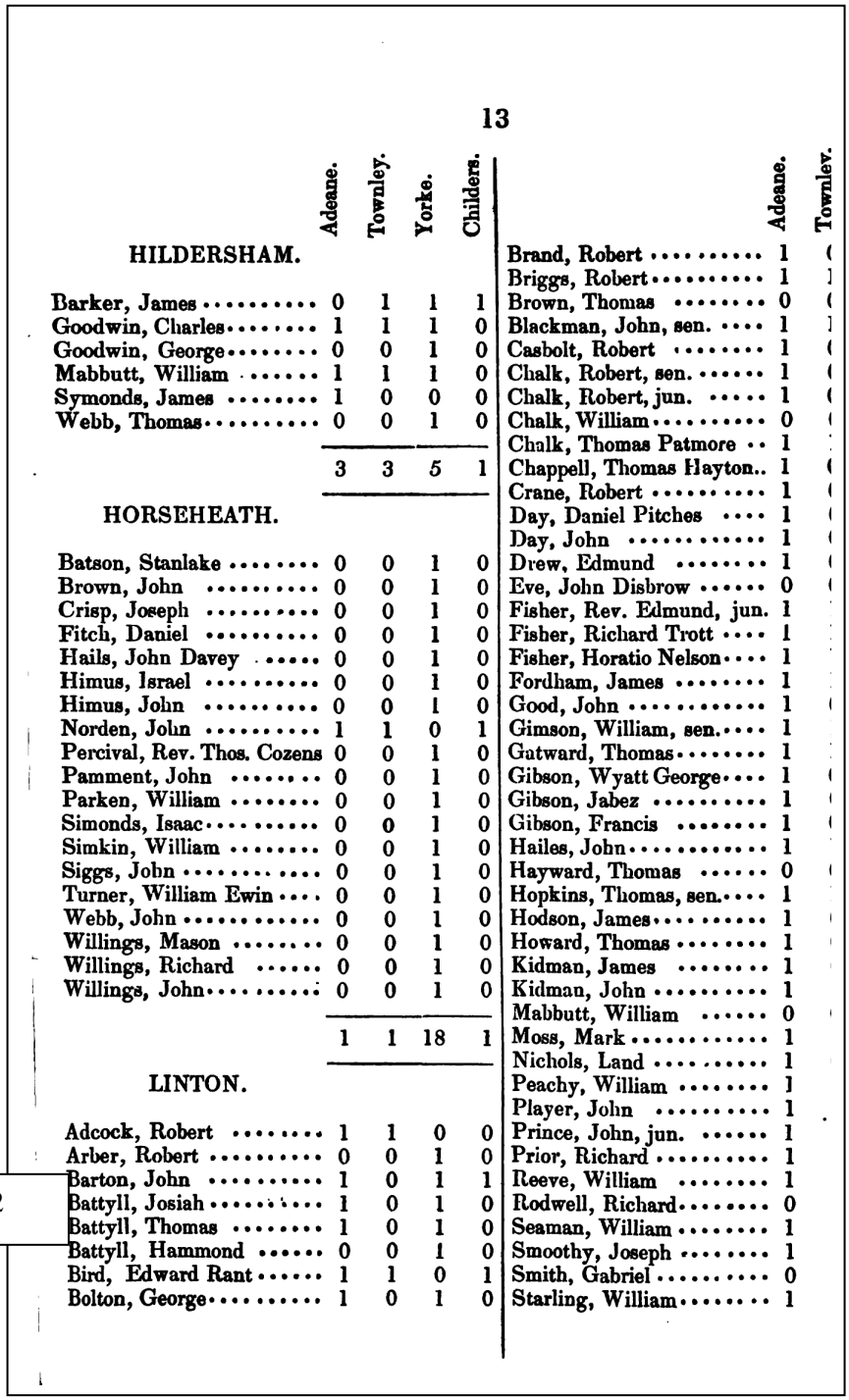
“Of course there’s another side to this. While some are trying to get our votes out, others are trying to keep the other side’s voters in. Sometimes it chances that a voter is inadvertently detained – the easiest way if to get some official to challenge his vote and then make sure the proceedings drag on till it’s too late for him to use it. Sometimes you can offer an opponent a drink, just to show there’s no hard feelings, and then get the barman to slip a little something into it.

“Then you try and ensure that some people are not allowed a vote at all, you challenge them when they revise the voting lists. There aren’t many who qualify anyway - you have to own property or live in a house that’s rated at a particular level - but it’s complicated over the University vote. The Reform Act disenfranchised any member of University occupying rooms within a college – but what about somebody like old Prof. Barnes at Peterhouse? He claimed

a vote on the Master's Lodge in Trumpington Street, which he said was away from the college. But he used to conduct official college business there instead of in the College Combination Room. Mind you he's dead now, quite a character he was, you'd see him about town in his bathchair" – a chair that Pickwick remembered all too well.

Long continued: "There is no doubt about it, elections may not matter to the electorate, but they do to those seeking their vote. You try anything and everything that's legal, and perhaps a thing or two that's not. But you must not go too far or the law will come down on you – like after the 1835 election when that chap was convicted of offering bribes. If I could persuade a voter that his vote it won't make any difference to him, except that he get £10 on one side and none on the other, it would make all the difference to me. It would only take about 80-100 payments to ensure a victory every election – and that sort of money would represent good value. We can't do that, but there's nothing to stop me going around the public houses and treating my friends to a drink, or a meal – or perhaps a free visit to Berry's 'house for girls'. Or the prospect of a bit of work here, a bit of flag carrying there. If you get someone like John Bennett, the bricklayer who'd been let down by his employer and in prison for debt then just the odd £10 to his wife comes in most useful. And if I do right by them, then I expect them to do right by me when the election time comes.

"But first I have to know who I'm targeting. So I start by getting the pollbook and copy the lists of voters out into street order so I can go around and make their acquaintance more easily. You find that the majority of voters in the Barnwell area support the Liberals, so that's the area to go for. But since they've got into power the Liberals are getting awkward. They've tried to stop the publication of the Poll Book and even now it's not in bookshops. But I'll find a way, have no fear". And with that, he departed, carrying his carefully packaged election print. Pickwick had no doubt that Samuel Long would go far in the Cambridge political sphere.



13

	Adeane.	Townley.	Yorke.	Childers.
HILDERSHAM.				
Barker, James	0	1	1	1
Goodwin, Charles	1	1	1	0
Goodwin, George	0	0	1	0
Mabbutt, William	1	1	1	0
Symonds, James	1	0	0	0
Webb, Thomas	0	0	1	0
	3	3	5	1
HORSEHEATH.				
Batson, Stanlake	0	0	1	0
Brown, John	0	0	1	0
Crisp, Joseph	0	0	1	0
Fitch, Daniel	0	0	1	0
Hails, John Davey	0	0	1	0
Himus, Israel	0	0	1	0
Himus, John	0	0	1	0
Norden, John	1	1	0	1
Percival, Rev. Thos. Cozens	0	0	1	0
Pamment, John	0	0	1	0
Parken, William	0	0	1	0
Simonds, Isaac	0	0	1	0
Simkin, William	0	0	1	0
Siggs, John	0	0	1	0
Turner, William Ewin	0	0	1	0
Webb, John	0	0	1	0
Willings, Mason	0	0	1	0
Willings, Richard	0	0	1	0
Willings, John	0	0	1	0
	1	1	18	1
LINTON.				
Adcock, Robert	1	1	0	0
Arber, Robert	0	0	1	0
Barton, John	1	0	1	1
Battyll, Josiah	1	0	1	0
Battyll, Thomas	1	0	1	0
Battyll, Hammond	0	0	1	0
Bird, Edward Rant	1	1	0	1
Bolton, George	1	0	1	0

	Adeane.	Townley.
Brand, Robert	1	(
Briggs, Robert	1	]
Brown, Thomas	0	(
Blackman, John, sen.	1	]
Casbolt, Robert	1	(
Chalk, Robert, sen.	1	(
Chalk, Robert, jun.	1	(
Chalk, William	0	(
Chalk, Thomas Patmore	1	:
Chappell, Thomas Hayton	1	(
Crane, Robert	1	(
Day, Daniel Pitches	1	(
Day, John	1	(
Drew, Edmund	1	(
Eve, John Disbrow	0	(
Fisher, Rev. Edmund, jun.	1	
Fisher, Richard Trott	1	
Fisher, Horatio Nelson	1	
Fordham, James	1	
Good, John	1	(
Gimson, William, sen.	1	
Gatward, Thomas	1	
Gibson, Wyatt George	1	(
Gibson, Jabez	1	(
Gibson, Francis	1	(
Hailes, John	1	
Hayward, Thomas	0	(
Hopkins, Thomas, sen.	1	
Hodson, James	1	
Howard, Thomas	1	
Kidman, James	1	
Kidman, John	1	
Mabbutt, William	0	
Moss, Mark	1	
Nichols, Land	1	
Peachy, William	1	
Player, John	1	
Prince, John, jun.	1	
Prior, Richard	1	
Reeve, William	1	
Rodwell, Richard	0	
Seaman, William	1	
Smoothy, Joseph	1	
Smith, Gabriel	0	
Starling, William	1	

Poll Book 1832

Pickwick selected several of the finest of Roe's engravings of Cambridge to carry back with him to London, items that would be sure to impress his friends. But Roe, the printseller, was still anxious to extract just another sale. Pickwick was a visitor, he was a gentleman interested in history, would he not appreciate a map of Cambridge so that he could find his way around?

Pickwick already had a small map in his somewhat out-dated guidebook, but Cambridge had changed rapidly in more recent times, following the enclosures of the open fields. Many new streets, houses and college buildings had been completed and an entire New Town started on the Hills Road to the south. So in 1830 Richard Grey Baker, a surveyor from Earith, had produced an up-to-date, large hand-coloured plan, selling at £1 8s.0d ready to hang. And for an extra two shillings he could have extra artwork, with additional colouring of the town and university coats of arms. With this map Pickwick could see every public house, school, footpath and milestone – and surely he was one to appreciate milestones, especially those along the road to Barkway?

But Pickwick was quick to point out that if Cambridge was changing so rapidly why surely a map that was now eight years old must be out of date – and what use was an old map in a changing town. Not to be outdone Roe changed tack. If Pickwick did not care for a modern map, how about a very old one; a map produced not in the 1830s, not the 1730s, not even in the 1630s – but back in the 1570s! It so happened he had a very rare copy of just such a thing, and being a good salesman, Roe knew something of the background of his stock.

"John Caius was physician to three sovereigns, Edward III, Mary and Elizabeth; as a young man he'd studied at Gonville Hall and then gone off to Italy where he turned to medicine and anatomy. On his return to England he became a Fellow of the Royal College of Physicians and made his regal connections. But when he paid a visit to his old college he was appalled and how it had decayed; as he'd made his fortune he decided to refound it, though he was adamant it should not admit any students who were deaf, dumb, deformed, invalids – or Welsh! A couple of years later, in 1559, he was appointed the new Head – but he was not an easy Master. He expelled some of the fellows & placed others in the stocks; he insisted the students had to be in early at night – and stopped them fixing candles to college walls.

"He also used his influence with Henry Cromwell, grandfather of Oliver, to acquire a great heap of stone that had been part of an aisle of Ramsey Abbey which had collapsed. This he used to build Caius Court, and knowing about hygiene he had one side left open so there might be free access to open air. He set out rules that stopped anyone throwing offal or dirt into the court, or air their beds and bed-linen there, or they would be fined 3s 4d. He also provided for a healthy, honest, true and unmarried man of forty years of age to clean and sweep the pavements.

"Under John Caius the study of medicine progressed. He even got permission from the crown to be allowed to have the bodies of two felons every year to practice on, though once they were finished with the remains were prayed over by the students at St Michael's church, just over the road. He became so famous that he lectured before the young Queen Elizabeth when she came to Cambridge in 1564 – only he mumbled so much that she couldn't hear and in the end had to move nearer to him.

But the world was changing; Caius was a staunch Catholic and had preserved in the chapel the pre-Reformation vessels, ornaments and furnishings, but in 1572 he was condemned for keeping such superstitious monuments – popish trumpery they were called in those Puritan times – and had to watch as they were ripped out, smashed and burned on a bonfire in the college court. He resigned his Mastership and moved to a house in the precincts of St

Bartholomew's Hospital in London where he died in 1573. His body was brought back to Cambridge and he was buried in the college chapel in great pomp and ceremony.

Caius had compiled notes on the history of Cambridge which he left to Matthew Parker, Archbishop of Canterbury, on condition that he have them printed and give twelve copies to his college to be chained up. To make the book more useful Parker found a draughtsman, Richard Lyne, to prepare a map to go with it, paying him 30s to engrave it, with an extra two shillings for colouring it in. It was published in 1574, ironically when Cambridge was in the grip of a great plague, brought into town on the clothes of a Londoner who'd come to Midsummer Fair, and the University was suspended – so it did not do much for its sales!

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Pickwick perused the ancient map of Cambridge that had been produced by Richard Lyne way back in the 1570s, and, incredibly he could actually find his way around. But as he studied he could see there had been many subtle changes.

His stagecoach had brought him into town along the Trumpington Road; they had passed Addenbrooke's Hospital, where that magnificent inebriate Jemmy Gordon had been taken following his accident. But of course it had not been established so far back - or had it? For there at the southern extremity of the map was a reference to 'Spittle Ende' - what was that. Sensing a sale Roe the printseller enlightened him; it was the site of an ancient Leper hospital, that of St Anthony and St Eligius, built about 1361 by a local benefactor Henry de Tangmer. He planned to leave it to the college of Corpus Christi, but the town took it over by force - and yes indeed it was still to be seen, if Pickwick looked hard enough, now providing accommodation for the poor.

Pickwick followed the map towards the town centre; there was Pembroke Hall, though it looked most dissimilar the building he had seen. But now something rang a dim bell in his mind. Surely there had been a great scandal there some 40 or so years earlier. The ever-ready Roe had the details.

It had been back in 1791 that Richard Rycroft, baronet undergraduate was attending a party in the college rooms of his fellow scholar, Henry Applewhaite, wealthy son of a Suffolk gentleman. All was going well until Rycroft made some uncomplimentary observations about the character of some of the other guests. Applewhaite, as host, was incensed - they might not be baronets, but they did not make such ungentlemanly remarks. My Lord Rycroft took great offence at being called a cad - Applewhaite should apologise at once. No sir, I shall not! In that case, roared Rycroft, I demand the satisfaction due from gentleman to gentleman - and stormed out.

Calmer counsel was not heeded, the die was cast. Both protagonists chose their seconds: a son of a wealthy East India merchant on one side, and the son of an Irish gentleman of considerable fortune on the other. The arrangements were put in place.

On Wednesday 23rd November 1791 the two scholars stood opposite each other on a piece of ground at Newmarket. The pistols were primed. At the given signal they paced the required distance, turned and fired. Any hope that blanks had been inserted in place of shot were dispelled when Lord Rycroft collapsed, nursing a wound to the chest. He died two days later and was buried at Newmarket.

Legal precedent had already established that if one man killed another in a duel then it was murder - indeed by merely taking part in such an activity in a public place both parties were punishable by a fine and imprisonment. There was no option open to the Coroner but a verdict

of murder on both the surviving duellist and the two seconds. But that was the law of the land What of the law of the University?

The Vice-Chancellor and the Heads of the colleges met to consider their judgement. Two of the undergraduates were sentenced to expulsion from the University, the third man had already left and they had no authority over him. Three days later they issued a proclamation banning students from practising their pistol shooting within the University - which came as something of a relief to the townsfolk, for undergraduates caused enough mayhem anyway without the prospect of them being armed as well!

It was in March 1792 that the surviving duellist faced trial at Bury Assizes. The court was packed with the greatest gentlemen of the county - for they could themselves so easily have been in the same situation; dash it what was a man to do if he were so challenged. The most eminent of the University came forward to attest to Mr Applewhaite's amiable character. The jury had no doubt - there was no charge to answer and when the dead man's mother, Lady Rycroft, withdrew her prosecution her son's killer walked free from the court.

But his academic career lay in tatters - or did it? Next year, having been expelled from Pembroke College Cambridge University he was admitted to St Alban Hall, Oxford - which itself was then very short of undergraduates, especially such honourable men. In 1796 Henry Applewhaite graduated, albeit not from his first-choice University; and perhaps that was the worst punishment of all!

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Pickwick turned his attention to the west side of Trumpington Street, as depicted on the map of 1574.

Peterhouse and its deer park was there, though it looked somewhat different from the building he recalled, and adjacent to it there was a church. It was not named on the map, but Roe identified it as that of St Mary the Less, which had originally been a Norman foundation, but had been taken over by the college and rebuilt as a chapel for their use for nearly 300 years. It was now back as a parish church but in poor condition. There were however a couple of things that might interest a seeker after parish gossip.

The first was about fat old Nicholson who'd been appointed to be minister about 100 years before. A gross, indolent man he'd been long engaged to the daughter of Mr Bartlett who kept the New Gardens, behind Peterhouse. It was at the end of July and the date of the wedding was near when he went up to London to prepare himself for the ceremony. He took rooms at the Bull Inn in Bishops Gate so that he would be convenient to catch the Cambridge coach. As the time for the departure of the coach neared there was no sign of the prospective groom so the bride's brother – who'd gone with him – knocked at his door. There was no reply. The landlord was summoned and the door unlocked. Inside they found Nicholson, dead of an apoplexy. So instead of returning to Cambridge by stagecoach, he came by hearse. As it reached the college gates the intended bride, inconsolable in her grief, was there to meet it; she insisted the coffin lid be taken off, so she could indeed be sure he was there.

But there's another body that attracts more attention – that of another vicar and Fellow of Peterhouse who died in September 1729. Godfrey Washington was a great uncle of George, the first President of the United States of America, and his memorial includes the family coat of arms of stars and stripes – thought to be the basis of the American flag. As a result, added Roe, it was a stopping place for many of the Americans who visited Cambridge

But was there any communication the other way; wondered Pickwick?

There'd been great attempts to encourage people to make the journey. Roe's own uncle had been tempted by advertisements that appeared in the Cambridge papers in 1803 for land at Prince Edward Island, Canada. There were two tracts were originally granted to the late Isaac Paunchond, Esq, a Banker at Paris who had become bankrupt. One was for 10,000 acres, already clear of wood and 1,500 acres fit for plough. The Township - no.47 - had already 20 families all of whom were doing well. There were convenient harbours for the cod fishery which was very abundant along the coast & you'd often see a dozen vessels lying at anchor at once so the inhabitants had the opportunity of purchasing luxuries and foreign necessaries as well as selling the product of their farms at their own doors.

But within a week somebody was claiming this was "an attempt to kidnap the unguarded by infamous and swindling associates" seeking to draw people from their peaceable abodes and send them to starve in a foreign waste. Uncle got admission to the University Library but there was no book of geography to explain the soil and trade. So he made asked around; he found a student who'd been bred near the island who said him there was not a acre of bad land in the place. He also took the opportunity to speak with Sir Robert Chambers & Sir George Pecknell who assured him that the soil was one of best in world, producing as fine wheat & barleys as an acre in England. They told him the original owners had been people incompatible with agriculture who would not depart from England for all lands beyond Western main. They were land jobbers looking for the passing years to make their assets rise in value without the trouble and fatigue of sticking a plough into the ground or dragging a harrow over its surface. The lands were being transferred in the Newmarket Way, with parties gambling for them at 20, or 40,000 acres a time.

Now this chap – Sam C. Took – was saying he'd sold upwards of 100,000 acres within12 months and not one person had ever expressed a wish to return. When uncle compared this with the price for 500 acres of fen rented per annum for which he'd been asked 16,000 guineas, it seemed too good to an offer to resist. But then there was the prospect of leaving his mother and grandmother behind weeping, while he was seeking his fortune on the other side the Atlantic and he turned against it.

"Mind you", Roe added, "others have been tempted; I've heard of six families emigrating to American from Willingham with another half-dozen from Over and eleven from Haddenham and each family received money from the parish to cover their expenses. If things do not get better they'll be more following"

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Returning to Lyne's 1574 map Pickwick could just make out the words 'Katherine hall', which Roe was quick to explain was now more normally spelt with a 'C', and he was able to give his version of some of its curious story.
"They say how the founder of the college, Dr Robert Woodlarke – who was Provost of King's College next door – did so to ensure his well-being for perpetuity. So he laid down that at every Mass prayers should be said for his body and soul; this was something he could enforce while he lived, but what of after. He ordered that once he was dead there should be a special requiem Mass, to be followed by another Mass every week on the same day as he'd died. Then at the end of term there would be a Requiem Mass. Nobody was going to forget him, if he had anything to do about it.

"His soul might be at peace but the same cannot be said for the college he founded. A couple of years after Richard Lyne made his line sketch in 1574 there was a fire that caused considerable damage. After that they acquired a bit of land here, a bit there, including the site of Thomas Hobson's stables and put up a mixture of buildings. But none of them were of any great merit – at least not according to David Loggan. For in his great survey of Cambridge in 1688 he shows all college buildings – except those of Catharine's. Instead he wrote that 'the

remains and ruins of the old college buildings were a sight too ugly to appear as a picture among the other colleges'. Instead he depicted only the most recent buildings as well as those actually planned but not then finished. Which is a bit confusing really for much of what he showed is still not there.

"But then Catharine Hall seems to have been particularly unfortunate over its buildings. For years they squabbled with their neighbour. Cats looked at Queens' across Milne Street – that's the main road that used to run half-way between the river and King's Parade until King Henry built his new college chapel right across it

"Now all colleges own bits of land here and there, and there can be few colleges who own all the land on which their buildings lie. When Catharine's wanted to construct a new Master's Lodge in the 1670s they found that a bit of land on their side of the road was actually owned by Queens'. So they entered into an agreement to lease this bit so that they could complete their scheme. All went well for a hundred years or so but then things got a bit factious between them.

"Queens' pointed out that the lease had expired and it was about time a new one was drawn up, and the rent reviewed. But Cat's felt that the old rent had been too high already and objected to an additional payment. Anyway they finally came to an agreement and to avoid having to go through it all again in the future the Master of Catharine's thought it would be better to buy the strip of land concerned outright. Queens' came up with a price of £530 which seemed reasonable until somebody calculated that as the plot amounted to about 252 yards, that worked out at £10,000 an acre!

"That's far too much! said Cats to Queens. You should have thought about that before you built on it! said Queens to Cats.
"So Catharine Hall sought legal opinion; if they refused to pay an ever increasing rent for the land, could Queens' take the land back and pull down that bit of the Master's Lodge that had been built on it? The eminent lawyer deliberated, and came back with the short answer: Yes! He advised they pay up but whatever they did they should keep quiet about their feelings for the college across the road. There were so many similar cases within the University that it would be opening a very big can of worms if they went to law. And anyway even at such an extortionate price they could not buy another plot replace the building for that money.
"Things went quiet until the lease was up for renewal again in 1810. Then debate restarted in earnest; it went on for nearly three years. Agreement was finally reached; Queens' sold the lands in dispute, together with another bit that the Master used as a garden. The price was not £530. It was £1,372. Now within the last year Cats have started to erect some new dwelling-houses on the site though doubtless Queens' will find cause to object!
" While all this was going on the college was building elsewhere. First they put up a Yorkshire Building just to house Fellows and students from that county. Then they've pulled down houses facing on to Trumpington Street and made this the main entrance to the college. It must have cost a fortune at today's prices but they think its worth it – for they've now completely turned their back on their old enemy, Queens'!"

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According to the ancient map Queens' college in 1574 comprised two courts – but how much reliability could you place on a map dating from the 1570's. Roe had obviously spent many hours perusing and researching. He pointed out a plot of land marked 'White Friers' on the northern side of the college.

This was, he explained, land that had been home to a group of Carmelite Friars. In the 1530s, sensing that their time was limited as the Dissolution of religious houses was being rumoured, they came to an agreement to sell their site to the Queens' college for better terms than they

were likely to get from the King. But the King was alert to the plot and ordered the college Provost, Dr Daye, to take possession of the property on behalf of the crown and to make a full inventory of its possessions. He said nothing about not pulling the buildings down and so the college set to with a will, for stone, slate, tiles, timber and glass were too important commodities to have hanging about unused when the college had building plans of its own. And anyway once they were reused who could really tell what they had been worth. Thanks to this ploy the college got them for a bargain price of £20.

This left an unused plot of land which lay overgrown and weed-ridden for some six years until King Henry decided to cash in his assets, selling it to John Eyre of Bury St Edmunds – who quickly resold it to Queens' college, doubtless at a handsome profit. The college extended their boundaries to snap it up. To the north their new acquisition was separated from King's college by a public thoroughfare called Choles Lane. To the East this linked up with another named Plott and Nuts Lane to Trumpington Street. To the west it led down to the river. This was soon blocked off and another of the old routes that had linked the town centre to the bustling trade along the Cam passed into history.

But the Cam itself seemed not to run where it now did. Pickwick had journeyed down it with Will Spread on his line of barges just the other day. He recalled a straight river running through newly-landscaped grounds with various new bridges across it. But in 1574 it had been very different indeed. Two distinct rivers then approached Cambridge from the south, each fed a watermill, Newnham to the west, the King's to the East. But then there was no mill pool, each channel continued north: there were two bridges spanning the road from Silver Street to Newnham. These bridges were originally maintained by a hermit who was allowed to celebrate divine service in a small chapel there, allowing travellers to give thanks for their safe arrival in Cambridge, and make some small contribution to cost of the crossing. It had not proved a lucrative enterprise until Henry IV granted permission to levy tolls rather than rely on donations and the hermit's chapel had been sold off about 25 years before Lyne had drawn his map.

The area here was still so low-lying, explained Roe, that when Beales the coal merchant built his house on the site of the hermitage he had needed to import a considerable amount of soil to raise the ground. But both sides of the river had also been elevated. The land to the west of the river had been raised in the 1790s by the dumping of earth taken from the graveyards of some seven town centre churches, while the banks to the east had been similarly raised with rubbish for the benefit of the colleges that lined the Cam.

The first of these was of course Queens' where Lyne's map showed the two streams creating an island which now housed the college's brewhouse, stables and the fellows' garden. This, added Roe, used to be a most attractive area with mature 100-year-old lime trees and a magnificent view downstream to King's college chapel and Clare Hall. But then had come the landscaping 'improvements' of 1817 that had seen the demolition of the old bridge at King's and the construction of a new one much further south that had quite spoiled the perspective. Queens' itself used to have three bridges crossing onto their island; now there was just one, the wooden structure that had been put up in 1749 at the suggestion of the college gardener, John Forlin. It had been designed by a Mr Etheridge and constructed by James Essex – and Roe would have gone on to tell the story of the 'mathematical' element had not Pickwick chipped in with his knowledge that the original 'Mathematical Bridge' had been the one at Garret Hostel demolished only the year before.

Beyond Queen's the two streams had converged and flowed in one wider river under a wooden bridge at King's and on towards Clare. This seemingly tranquil area had been the site of a bitter battle between the two colleges that had rumbled on for some 300 years.

Pickwick listened as Roe outlined the controversy that had raged between King's and Clare colleges. In the 1630s the Fellows of Clare College decided it was time they had their own bridge. The snag was that their property did not come down to the river. The land between the back of their building and the river belonged to King's and was used by them for archery practice, as an exercise ground for some 100 people, and as pasture for their ten horses. Nevertheless Clare approached their neighbours to see whether they would be prepared to sell or exchange it; and at the same time, having laid out their arguments, Clare decided to approach the King as well.

Charles I, was then much concerned about an outbreak of plague that was ravaging London and could see the benefit of Clare scholars being able to have a back way out of their college, rather than have to cross King's college's bridge. The King approved the deal in 1637. King's college did not. Tempers flared and the King was called in to arbitrate. He backed his original decision, forcing King's to give up the land. But it was not fair, people protested, and the people who suffered most were the children of the college grooms who had lost their traditional play area. So Clare made a gift of £10 to ease their loss, and another payment of £100 to King's college to soothe their ruffled feathers. They built their bridge and laid out an avenue of trees leading to the open fields beyond the river.

But peace did not reign. The enforced land swap continued to rankle and had flared up again only 21 years ago when King's tried again to reclaim their lost lands. It took an Act of Parliament to settle the matter once and for all – and another land swap, this time Clare giving up a piece of their land to their neighbour.

Beyond Clare college the river had divided once more to enclose another island, Garret Hostel green. The main navigation seemed to have been around the western edge for various small footbridges led on to it from the town side. From here there was a public thoroughfare to the town centre down what in 1574 had been known as Findsilver Lane. Today, said Roe with a smile, it had two names – Trinity Lane, or in certain companies, as Piss-Pot Lane from the number of college windows that opened into it from which such items could be emptied on to the heads of unwary passers by!

The Cam itself was of course a major source for disposal of such effluent, though it would appear that it did not stunt the growth of fish, for on the map Lyne had sketched an angler in doublet and hose, with on the bank beside him a fine specimen. Nor was it only fish that could be found in the river – Roe had heard of a somewhat bizarre discovery of a human skeleton found chained to stakes set on the bed of the stream.

Garret Hostel island had once been part of the Cambridge common, now it belonged to Trinity College. In the past it was not much use for anybody, being often waterlogged and so infested with college students taking their exercise on it that no townsman dare graze his cattle on it anyway. Such loss of public land was no uncommon in Cambridge, indeed in the years when the Mortlock family had dominated civic life many areas had been disposed of to friends of councillors. But this piece had been given away as early as 1612 when it had formed part of a land swap with Trinity. The council gave up Garret Hostel Green and the bit alongside and Trinity gave up the piece of its land in the town centre that was leased out to Edward Parker, a cook. The bit of land now universally known as Parker's Piece.

Though the transfer between town and gown did not cause conflict between the participants it did cause conflict between neighbours. St John's college objected to Trinity's proposals to inclose their new land. But they made it clear they would be willing to waive their objection

in consideration of an annual payment of a shilling a year and a supply of water from Trinity's private pipe. They would also like a bit of town land for themselves for use as a bowling green – and this at least they were successful in acquiring in a separate deal with the council.

There was just one public bridge crossing the river along the Backs. The modern cast-iron structure at Garret Hostel was the latest in a line of bridges dating back well into the sixteenth-century, with one being swept away by floods in the 1520s. The ancient map showed that by 1574 Trinity had constructed a replacement wooden bridge crossing the river & a major causeway through the boggy wilderness to the west of the river, using hundreds of loads of rubbish and gravel to give a firm foundation. They had also planted an avenue of trees on either side.

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Then having done it once they did it again about 100 years later, this time erecting their own college bridge and planting avenues of lime trees – since replaced by elms; then in the 1760s they had imported American poplars and weeping willows which they'd planted by the riverside.

Beyond Garret Hostel the Cam streamlets had then united into one major stream and continued unhindered until it reached Magdalene Bridge.

Once more the river's importance in the life of the town was indicated by Lyne's sketch of fishermen trailing their nets from the back of their boat. The map also shows other boats moored beside the bridge, and just as in the present day these boats had needed to make the journey upstream to the Mill Pool. Then, as now, they needed assistance to make the passage, a bank to hale from or a hard bottom to the river to give their horses a firm grip when they

needed to take to the centre of the stream. By 1574 a start had obviously been made in this regard.

But the map also showed something else – the original route of the river. Roe directed Pickwick's attention to a series of ditches that crossed the marshy ground. They started on Sheep's Green, and meandered north, well to the west of the embanked Cam with occasional diversions down to the main river. For a while they ran alongside the track that led from Newnham until that petered out in the marsh. These ditches, Roe was convinced marked the original route of the river, indeed during times of flood these old channels still filled up with water.

Near St John's College the small ditches were joined by another tributary, the Bin Brook and only then did it run in its present channel under Magdalene Bridge and off towards Chesterton.

Pickwick had stood on the Bridge Street bridge, had seen the bustle of river craft unloading their wares at Quayside. What he had not seen was another ditch that joined up with the Cam just a little further along – in fact Spread the bargee had not mentioned one – and yet the 1574 map showed it clearly and named it 'The King's Diche'. It headed off south, behind St Clement's & 'St Pulchers' round church, under Jesus Lane and right across the site of Sidney Sussex college, then just a cleared piece of ground that was marked with the words 'Gray Friars'. Roe suggested that the old Franciscan priory buildings must have been cleared following the dissolution of the monasteries – probably to be reused in the construction of Trinity College, who had acquired the site from King Henry VIII. Having got what they wanted – the stone – they had to consider what to do with the land. Cambridge corporation wanted it for a hospital for the poor, but so did the executors of the Countess of Sussex who wanted to build another college. Really there was no competition, education must triumph every time. But who would want to build on a site dissected by a ditch?

The King's Ditch continued its southern passage beyond Sidney Sussex, under Walles Lane and behind the properties fronting the present Sidney Street till it burrowed beneath it at the junction with what the map called 'Peti curie'. Here Lyne had marked 'ye gate to Barnewell'. It continued westwards diagonally across Hog Hill, behind the Lion Hotel, and along Pembroke Street back to the road to Trumpington near St Botolph's church. Normally Pickwick would have associated gates with town walls – as at York and Chester, but perhaps at some stage this ditch had been dug as a moat around the two sides of Cambridge not already surrounded by the Cam. Roe had his theories.

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Roe, the printseller, was also a scholar. His knowledge of Latin was somewhat superior to that of Pickwick, and anyway he had much more opportunity to decipher the Latin text that Richard Lyne had included at the top of his 1574 map about the King's Ditch and it's place in the town's history.

He talked Pickwick through it, making a rough translation as he went: *Cantebrigia vrbs celeberrima a Granta fluuio vicino Cairgrant a primo non tarn vrbis quam Academiae conditore Cantabro, magni nominis Hispano, Cantebrigia, a Saxonibus Grauntecestre, et Grantebrige iam olim nuncupata est.* "Cambridge is a very famous city, named from the neighbouring river Granta. It was named Cangrant from the first Cantabrian founder, who founded the University rather than the city, A Spaniard of great estimation, then it was called Cantebrigia, then Grantchester by the Saxons and again in ancient time it bore the name Gantebrige".

The story of its foundation is a pack of lies, opined Roe. In the olden days there was a great debate between Oxford and Cambridge as to which was the older university; one would claim one thing, then the other would try and better it. That's how the 'School of Pythagoras' comes into it, pretending that the Greek philosopher had been here in the 6th century

Fluuius hodie antiquum nomen retinens, flexuosis riparum anfractibus ab austro in aquilonem mari tenus longissimo tractu protenditur … That goes on about the river itself … that's not the bit.

Muro fuisse cinctam historian referunt sed eum Pictis Danicis et Saxonicis bellis (ut et veterem urbis faciem) concidisse. "The histories relate that it was girt with a wall, but that this fell, together with the ancient front of the city, in the wars between the Picts, Danes and Saxons"

Henricus tertius AnglieRex circa annum Domini 1265 fossa et portis Cantebrigiam muniuit. Quo tempore ibidem contra exhaeredatorum iniurias et excursiones qui Eliensem Insulam occupabant se defendit. "Henry III, King of England, about 1265 fortified Cambridge with a ditch and gate. At the same time he defended himself against the wrongs done him by his heir and against expeditions which were occupying the Isle of Ely". Roe explained: This was a time when rebellious Barons occupied the island of Ely, as Hereward the Wake and Geoffrey de Mandeville had done before them. Only this time there was a period of hot weather and the fens dried up sufficiently to allow the King easy access. He couldn't hold on to it however and the rebels came back the next year and the dispute dragged on

Muro etiam iam turn rursus cinxisset, nisi eo absente Londino a Gilberto Clarensi duce occupato noum calamitati prospicere fuisset coactus. "He would again have girt it with a wall unless in his absence at London it had been occupied by Gilbert, Duke of Clarence, and he was compelled to take measures against a flesh calamity". As soon as Henry had left a group of rebels attacked Cambridge; they forded the ditch, burnt the gates and plundered and destroyed all the houses where the King and his men had stayed. It was only after a great deal of pleading that they spared Barnwell priory itself. Things looked desperate except that one of the rebel barons changed sides and was appointed by the King to guard Cambridge.

Huic fossae quae ab eo tempore Regiae nomen obtinuit vestigium quoddam in hae charta cernitur. *"Some traces of this ditch, which from that time bore the Royal name is found in this map" – well we can see that for ourselves; but the next bit gives a description of what it was like*: Sed quae ad vrbis ambitum et defensionem altissimis fuit et latissimis fossionibus.. *"This ditch was equipped with very deep and very broad excavations , to surround and defend the city*"

Now as I've researched it, said Roe, the bank of this ditch was bounded by a walkway which nobody was allowed to encroach on. So when you walk down Hobson Street or Mill Lane I reckon you're walking along part of that old defence road. Mind you it became a common drain: *primum apparata expurgandis platearum fecibus, eluendisque in Grantam fluuium sordibus non male nunc inseruit* "even now it serves fairly to carry off the filth of the streets and wash away the dirt that gathers, to the river Granta"

But instead of being defensive it became offensive, people soon started putting their rubbish in it and there were endless attempts to get it cleared out. But as Lyne said all those years ago: *Quod si Cantabrigienses coniunctis opibus efficerent vt qui est ad vadum Trumpingtoniae amniculus fossam hanc allueret, non esset Cantebrigia vrbs vlla elegantior, tantique facti memoria non tam posteris grata quam ipsis iucunda et fructuosa existeret.* "If the people of Cambridge, uniting their wealth, had brought it about that the little river which rises by the ford of Trumpington" – that's Hobson's Brook – "there would have been no city more

charming than Cambridge, and the memory of so great an achievement would have been left, not so much pleasing to posterity, as sweet and profitable to the inhabitants themselves"

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Having been studying Richard Lyne's 1574 map for some time Pickwick was feeling in need of an opportunity to stretch his back; but Roe had not finished with it yet. Now he turned his attention to the main road through the town, shown on the map as 'Heighe Warde', the one that ran from St John's college, past Trinity and Caius, Kings and Cats, between Peterhouse and Pembroke and away to the south.

"Do you notice that for the most part there are colleges on one side and churches on the other, it's a dividing line between the two sides of Cambridge life, colleges to the west, town to the east."

He pointed out each church. First, All Saint's, originally been known as All Saints in the Jewry. The Jews came to Cambridge soon after the Norman Conquest and lend money to merchants and country landowners who wanted to build large houses in the town. They were part of the building boom and themselves became wealthy. They constructed their own houses around the centre of the town & erected a synagogue near the market. This was later given to the Franciscan Friars who occupied it for 50 years till they acquired the site that was later to become Sidney Sussex college. The synagogue then became the town hall, or tollbooth – the present Guildhall. Nearby a stone-build house of Benjamin the Jew on Market Hill was used as a gaol.

King Henry III appreciated the financial support of the Jews and issued proclamations for their protection, but when the Barons raided in 1266 many of them were kidnapped and ransomed at high price – which was part of the reason he erected the King's Ditch. But after the King's death his widow ordered their expulsion from any town where she had commercial rights. This included Cambridge and so the Jews with their wealth and expertise moved to Huntingdon.

It was All Saints church, opposite Trinity College that makes the street so narrow, Roe remarked. There had been a big rebuilding scheme in 1821 when they realigned the footpath but now the tower juts out into the street and is pierced by an archway through which people have to walk. It seems always to be under repair; the old chancel had been pulled down about 1726 and rebuilt, though they did re-erect the old monuments.

But there's one memorial that was worth seeking out. It marks the grave of Dr Baker who died in 1745 at Trinity College in the same room in which he had been admitted when he first came to the University. He'd risen to become a Fellow and even Vice Master but had fallen on bad times after being appointed to the Rectory of Ticklebrow in Norfolk. He got himself into debt and been forced to leave his ministry so he returned to his old college under a cloud. He was a changed man after his experiences, a little odd, some said. He insisted that his rooms should not be washed with river water, in case they should smell of fish. Having once dressed in the height of fashion now he started to wear four or five nightcaps under his wig, and a black cloak over his college gown and cassock, under which he'd have various waistcoats, even in the hottest weather. A few days before he died he sent for the people who were to provide his shroud, coffin and gravestone and gave precise instructions about what he wanted, and where he wanted to be buried. And they did what he said: they buried him on the Friday evening of All Saint's Day and had the funeral service next morning.

Talking of characters; what of Dr Ewin, who was always meddling in other people's affairs and annoyed virtually everybody, both town and gown. The poor man suffered with a squint – people said he got it from too much peeping through keyholes. Anyway one day, about 1770, he was in a coffee house with some college men in the next box. They thought they would annoy him so they pretended to call their dog 'Squintum', swearing about it and shouting out. Well Dr Ewin knew what they were up to and jotted down everything they said. Next day he fined them five shillings per oath, for using bad language in public. But they got their own back. Next week there was a ballad being hawked about the streets – and Roe rummaged to find it.

"Of all the Blockheads in the Town,
That strut and bully up and down,
And bring complaints against the Gown,
There's none like Dr Squintum.

The boys in the street him hiss and hoot,
No name so vile that will not suit,
This strong resemblance of a brute,
The busy Dr Squintum.

Enrag'd to hear this humming crew,
Which all around his Thickhead flew,
The monster snorted, just like you,
Illustrious Dr Squintum

With Law I'll pester every man,
And must persue my noble plan
To do whatever Harm I can,
Thus blubbers Dr Squintum

A character indeed! Needless to say the ballad was added to Pickwick's scrapbook.

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Roe the printseller continued his minute examination of the 1574 map of Cambridge and drew Pickwick's attention to the church of St Michael in Trinity Street. It was a building that attracted little notice, but had once been Cambridge's second oldest college.

Back in the reign of Edward II Hervey de Stanton who was Chancellor of the Exchequer, decided he would like to found a college of chaplains and scholars. So he bought the rights to appoint the clergy to St Michael's church from Dera of Madingley, together with a house that went with it, for one hundred marks of silver and got permission from the Bishop to celebrate the Mass and undertake all the other parochial duties. He then pulled the church down and had it rebuilt so it was suitable for his needs. He next bought a house big enough for seven scholars and a master to live in, just across the street.

Hervey died at York in 1327 and according to his wishes his body was brought down to Cambridge in great state and pomp and was buried in the chancel of St Michael's in the middle of all his scholars. It was an impressive ceremony, and it cost an impressive amount of money. But then over the centuries his tomb disappeared, bit by bit and most people forgot about him. Then 30 years ago – 1808 - some workmen were digging a vault for a Mrs Smith and they found this old stone coffin. Half the lid was missing and inside they could see the

skeleton of an old man – in very good condition, considering he had been there nearly 500 years.

And that's a lot longer than his college lasted. Once he'd got the buildings he got permission from the king – Henry II - and it was opened in September 1324 under the name Michael House. Hervey himself was there and he chose the first two members of his new college, they then chose another five fellows. Next there was a large meeting of all the University and all the important townspeople who were assembled to witness the birth of this new body. A body needed a head, and Hervey announced that Walter de Buxton had been elected by the Fellows – in fact he'd been elected before the Fellows themselves were elected, but that's just a technicality.

It was a foundation for older scholars, as everyone had to be either a priest or a Master of Arts – and you had to be 25 years old before you could be ordained. The new college acquired more and more property, most of it in Trinity Street and became recognised as a separate institution. But then in December 1546 King Henry VIII decided that he wanted to endow a college of his own and ordered Michael House, and another college King's Hall, to surrender their property and become part of his new Trinity College.

Michael House had used the south aisle of St Michael's church as their college chapel; Trinity College needed more space than that so they took over the central Chancel until they got around to building a chapel of their own. As the north aisle was used by Gonville Hall you can see that the church had a definite connection with the University.

It also has a place in the religious history of the country, for in 1549 two German Protestant Divines, Martin Bucer and Paul Fagius were brought to Cambridge to teach Divinity and Hebrew. Fagius died within a few days of arriving and was buried in St Michael's church. But when Queen Mary came to the throne she reinstated the Catholic faith to a country that had become Protestant. Latimer, Ridley and Cranmer, bishops who had been educated in Cambridge were burned at the stake in Oxford and John Hullier suffered a similar fate on Jesus Green. Most of the college Masters were removed and only those who subscribed to the Roman Catholic religion could obtain a degree. Mary sent a Commission to Cambridge who ruled that services could not be held in St Michael's church because Fagius was buried there. The same applied to St Mary the Great where Bucer had been interred. Their bodies were exhumed and the coffins carried to the Market Hill – though Fagius' original coffin had fallen apart and they had to transfer him to a new one. The coffins were bound with chains – as if the bodies had been alive – to a stake and piles of wood heaped up and set on alight, together with piles of what they considered to be heretical books. Being Saturday - market day - there were great crowds of country folk in town and they were appalled at the proceedings – why should they bind up rotten carcasses, they wouldn't run away!

Then on the Sunday the Bishop of Chester blessed a large tub of water, he added salt, ashes and wine and walked three times round the outside, and three times inside Gt St Mary's, to hallow the building. Next day they did the same thing to St Michael's church. Since then things had been decidedly less exciting – though he had one tip; should Pickwick decide to attend one of the Rev Scholefield's services he should be sure to avoid the free seats near the Communion Table. Since the 'improvements' of 1835 they were too small for big people and however good the sermon it would be far too long for comfort.

As Pickwick perused the 1574 map of Cambridge it seemed obvious that some areas had changed little over the intervening centuries. Market Hill then was very similar to market hill in 1838, the shops he had explored with Isaac Moule the bellman were shown, with the little Pump Lane running between them and buildings backing up to the church of St Mary the Great. One thing was different – Lyne's map marked a Market Cross from which the market was proclaimed open every Saturday & where any trader who had been licensed and paid a toll could set out his goods. On other days the market was open to those burgesses of the town who had the freedom to trade, or who had paid for an annual licence. The Market Cross was destroyed soon after Lyne's map had been drawn, it was rebuild in 1664 but removed again in 1786 – the Council decreeing that it could be replaced if found necessary – it never was

And there dominating the town centre was the partially finished church of St Mary the Great. The original church had been damaged by fire in July 1290 in a conflagration which had also destroyed a number of houses. After 200 years a new church had been started to more better reflect the importance it played in the life of the University – but owing to the poor state of University finances and a somewhat lack of enthusiasm - it had taken 130 years to complete. And then, right at the end, had come sadness. The man who had masterminded the building lost his life in an accident at the moment of its final completion in 1608. A monument in the chancel records the tragedy:

A speakinge Stone
Reason may chavnce to blame;
But did it knowe
Those Ashes here doe lie,
Which brought the Stones
That hid the Steeple's shame;
It would affirme
There were no Reason why,
Stones should not speake
Before theyr Builder die.
For here JOHN WARREN
Sleeps among the dead;
Who with the Church
his own Life finished.
Anno Domini 1608, Dec. 17.

It was not of course, the end of rebuilding, and work had – Roe observed - continued up to the present day. One of the most noticeable changes of more recent times had come in 1767 when two hovels standing at the west end of the north and south aisles were pulled down to open up the prospect of the church from King's Parade. But when they were taken down there was more work to do - repairing the stonework of the walls of the church against which they had been built. Now, said Roe, some people were campaigning to have the buildings against the east wall removed as well, to give an unrestricted view of the church from the Market Hill.

Given the special nature of the building, being both the University church and a parish church for the people of central Cambridge the scope for dispute and disagreement has been endless. Indeed there was a continued squabble between University and parish over the running costs of the building. The University hold two services there on Sundays, the parish only one, but the University contributed only one-twentieth of the cost – or so the townsfolk claimed.

The latest issued to divide them had been the provision of new pews. In 1819 the University made great improvements in the church by enlarging the pit and two side galleries, and putting in a completely new gallery together with ten new pews. Having erected them they applied for a faculty to ensure the additional space created was for University use – though

they said the parish could have six of the new pews.

Well although this was agreed back then the University never got around to actually implementing the arrangements until 1836 and by then the parish had changed their minds. What's more they'd put in even more pews – and demanded that the University should meet two-thirds of the expense. The University said they hadn't been consulted, the parish said if they paid they could have two of them, the University said they would if the parish paid for the faculty, the parish said …well heaven knows what they did say. When you get bickering like this I try and shut my mind to it; if you got involved you'd go mad, said Roe

But whatever the rights and wrongs of who can sit where there's no doubt about it that they need every seat they can get for the University services on Sunday afternoons!

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On a Sunday afternoon in term time there was one tradition that visitors must view, but to Roe the printseller it was no mere ceremony. The University Sermon truly represented the most important part of his life. His description had an intensity that surprised his listener.

At two o'clock the streets that have been quiet and empty become suddenly full of animation, and chequered with costumes. Fluttering gowns of black, and blue, and scarlet, and silver, and gold come thronging from every quarter. From one direction comes the procession of the Vice-Chancellor with his silver mace bearers; then come the Proctors, and Proctor's Guards. From the opposite direction processes the Mayor in his ochre and sable robes with his liveried retainers. And from all around come those townsfolk who have aspiration to mix with the nobility, with their rustling dames and beribboned daughters – most sadly more interested in who they'll see rather than what they'll hear.

All are heading in one direction: the church of St Mary the Great on Market Hill. Inside it is each to his station. One gallery fills with the Venerable Heads of the colleges, flanked by young Noblemen, and backed by rows of learned Doctors and Professors. The other three are occupied by a dense mass of Bachelors of Arts and Undergraduates, so closely packed as scarcely to leave a square inch of standing room. Below in the Nave, are met the Masters of Arts and the Fellow Commoners - the privileged estate of the University - and beyond them in the parish pews lie large parterres of bonnets and silks, smooth headed elderly gentlemen, looking expectant and excited – and my family.

All await the arrival of the frequently-bashful Preacher, who, following a Silver Mace sedately runs the gauntlet of the crowded Nave and mounts the pulpit. The organ peals softly and sweetly, and the voices of the choir ring distinctly from aisle to aisle (Thomas Case and his colleagues working their accustomed magic, thought Pickwick). Then suddenly the mighty organ breaths forth its full strength at the last stanza of the Psalm & some eight hundred Bachelors and Undergraduates, who alone have remained seated, rise simultaneously as if pulled by a puppet wire, and for the first time seem to take part in the service.

The Psalm ended a solemn silence ensues, while the prayer for Church and State, with the Universities of the land - and that of Cambridge in particular - including also a commemoration of the Civil in addition to the Academical Functionaries thereof - is slowly delivered, and devotionally received. At the name of the Lord's prayer in conclusion every head becomes buried in an attitude of most heartfelt reverence.

In this circle, so eloquently silent, you will find every shade and grade of intellectual capacity, from the most indolent and barren to the most apprehensive and cultivated mind; from the imagination which is ever crouching before the things of the flesh, to that which loves to wing

its way through the world of spirits. In a word, here are congregated, elbow to elbow, the fool and the philosopher, the pious and the prodigal - characters as totally distinct and separate as light from darkness. But now in this one duty - the utter humiliation and bowing of our soul before Him who is infinitely removed from all – we are linked side by side upon perfect equality.

As prayers end a medley of most inharmonious noises occupies the next few seconds; a coughing and scraping and rustling and whispering. But then the Preacher opens his sermon - twice or thrice presses it energetically downwards upon the velvet cushion - once glances covertly around him - and then in the midst of a calm, as dead as it is sudden, delivers his text and commences his discourse.

In such an assembly, embracing so many refined and educated intellects, it is highly interesting to watch the attitudes and countenances of the thoughtful listeners, as the thrilling voice of a Hare or a Melvill speaks to their hearts. It is still more curious to witness the singular effect of the intensity of interest excited, when at each decided pause, or at some climax in the Preacher's appeal, an epidemic of coughing and sighing, and clearing of the throat, and shifting of elbows and knees, runs rapidly throughout the congregation. Then suddenly it ceases and once more you can hear a pin drop.
But sometimes then from behind the curtains that conceal the choir there'll come a giggling and gossiping from choristers who deserve a whipping. (And who suffered them, remembered Pickwick). But such was the intensity of devotion that not even this could detract from the message of a good preacher whose discourse would be analysed and discussed long into the evening by devout undergraduates who within a few years would themselves be seeking to spread the word of God throughout the world, some even to the Godless parts of Cambridge itself, such as Barnwell

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Once more Pickwick turned his attention to the map of 1574; who would have believed that a map that old could contain such detail, or that many of the buildings it showed would still be there over 360 years later!
This time it was the church identified as St Edward's to which Roe referred. It was not one those much viewed by visitors – though ought to be seen now for in all probability it would not be there for very much longer. In fact because of subsidence it was in a ruinous and dangerous state. The north pier of the Chancel arch had started to sink many years ago and despite attempts to tie it together with iron bars and buttress it up it was continuing to fracture; the walls, columns and piers were now so much out of upright, and dragging different ways, that the roof itself seemed about ready to collapse.

Not that you would be aware of it; you enter under a low west gallery in what might well be mistaken for a lumber room. It's dark, and filled with pews and cupboards with the font in the centre. You thread you way through these into the dark and gloomy main body of the church.

The walls are dark, the windows small and partially blocked by a reredos, not that they got much light because of that house build close up beside the church outside – they were even now talking of pulling it down. The Chancel is filled with box pews that are dilapidated and discreditable, uncouth and lumbering, all heights and sizes, some old and some new, all disgraceful. The whole impression is one of damp and cold, ruin and decay.

One of the columns supporting the Organ Gallery has gone – it was resting on coffin which has crumbled into dust. The flooring is very old and bad, and as the floorboard creak apart you often become aware of the vaults and old graves beneath – you might not always see

them but you can't miss the unhealthy odours that come up from them – it quite puts off the congregation.

Mind you some of the people buried there are quite interesting characters – there was Dr William Redlington, who died about 70 years ago. He was Regius Professor of Law in the University – a noisy, disagreeable lanthorn jawed Fellow – better known for his language rather than his theology. It was profane in the extreme; and so were his views – he made no secret of his utter disbelief of much of the doctrine he was supposed to espouse. But then several who have preached in the church have spoken things that their masters did not approve of. Under Henry VIII when Lutheran doctrines began to spread from Europe a group of Augustinian friars started a discussion group in the White Horse Inn – which became known as 'Little Germany'. That went on for a couple of years until one of them went too far; on Christmas Eve 1525 Robert Barnes preached a sermon in St Edward's church and was convicted of heresy. Hugh Latimer and Thomas Bilney voiced similar opposition to ceremonial and ceremonies and all three of them ended up being burned at the stake. The pulpit that they preached from is still there in the church – but its not used for ordinary services, and you'll need good eyes to find it in the murk.

What you will see are two side aisles, extending half-way down the chancel and projecting out into the churchyard. They belong to two colleges & are reminders of two other churches, long disappeared. Here Roe indicated a small structure shown by Lyne at the west end of King's college chapel. It was then the belfry for the chapel but it stood on the graveyard of a church dedicated to St John the Baptist. Once Henry VI had decided he was going to build his massive chapel he needed to clear the site. So he cut Milne Street & pulled down the houses and hostels that stood on the land he wanted – but then he had to do something about that church. Clare & Trinity Halls had used it before their own chapels were completed, and buried their dead in the graveyard. They didn't actually have much use for it by then, but on the other hand they surely deserved some compensation for its loss. So Trinity Hall negotiated with the King and was granted the living of St Edward's church, with which the old parish was amalgamated, and both colleges built their own aisles. So the present church serves both town and gown – in fact it's the parish church for King's college itself.

But the story doesn't end there; perhaps his conscience was troubling him for King Henry arranged for a new St John's church to be built near the site of the first, alongside his chapel. It was completed by 1453 but didn't last long and fell down after about a hundred years. And now there was talk about pulling down St Edward's and starting again – history repeating itself, as usual.

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Roe the printseller transferred his attention to what Richard Lyne had marked on his 1574 map as Benett ch", a building which seemed to be joined to "Benett coll" to the south. Pickwick knew something of that institution following his conversation with porter John Fynn, the church itself he had heard less about.

St Bene't's - short for Benedict's - was one of the oldest buildings in Cambridge, far outdating any college. It stood on the corner of Luthborne Lane – its name now changed to commemorate the Free School founded by Stephen Perse in the early 1600s. Roe had heard it suggested it may once have been the church of a small village all on its own in the open countryside before the original settlement on Castle Hill had spread southward to swallow it. It after all was on an area of higher land in between Cambridge's four southern hills - Senate House, Market, Peas & Hog or St Andrew's, (the northern ones being Castle, Pound and Honey). But then the church had been commandeered by Corpus Christi college for use as its chapel for over 200 years.

Since then it had been knocked about and changed considerably but the proof of its antiquity was still visible to all to see. The church tower was an excellent example of what was called 'Norman' architecture. The walls were of rough stonework about three feet thick, covered with rough-cast plaster – though this was now being removed in an operation which seemed destined to destroy some of its antiquarian features. But then there was not much good worrying about a bit of plaster when the whole tower itself was in imminent danger of collapse. It was all down to the bells.

The bells had been part of St Benedict's church for hundreds of years. The University had used them to convene clerks to their lectures back in the 1270s – just as the early monks had used the bells at Barnwell priory to wake the brethren in the dormitory for late and early prayers, or to warn them it was time to wash their hands and make their way to the refectory for breakfast. But this had led to a dispute between the Rector and the Chancellor of the University that got so heated that the Bishop of Ely was called in to arbitrate and ended up negotiating a suitable payment for ringing the bells in "a civil and honest manner". This had obviously smoothed ruffled feathers for the University had continued to use them to announce their services and ceremonies for another 200 years before transferring to Great St Mary's.

But now something was obviously wrong; you had only to pass by the church when the ringers were in full stroke and you could see the very tower of the church sway to the rhythm of the bells. Inside you had to dodge bits of falling masonry and no matter how often they plastered up the cracks they kept reappearing. If something was not done it would likely be a case of history repeating itself – again.

For that belfry at King's college chapel that he had pointed out earlier had contained a magnificent ring of five bells, presented by King Henry VI – though some said they were even older than that, with one being brought back from France after the battle of Agincourt. Whatever the truth they were long considered the largest bells in England – but they had never been properly hung. They had been left in that wooden belfry which, like the bells themselves, became ruinous. Nobody took much notice until Henry West, the bell ringer, was crushed to death when one of them fell on him in 1728. Even then the college left the belfry standing for another 11 years. The bells were moved into the chapel itself for safe keeping. Only they were not safe there: they were so heavy they sank into the floor and in the end they were sold as being useless.

With those bells removed the oldest ones left in Cambridge were those at St Botolph's church – a complete medieval ring of four bells, made about 1460, and untouched from that day to this. But it was one thing to have bells, another to know how to ring them. When Elizabeth I had visited Cambridge in 1564 she did so amidst the clanging of all the church and college bells – and there was not one decent peal in the place. Things had changed since those days and now the Society of Cambridge Youths – founded over 100 years ago – had brought bell ringing to a new level. But it was St Bene't's that could be considered the nursery of the art. Fabian Stedman, recognised as the inventor of change-ringing, had been parish clerk there in the 1650s; and it was in Cambridge that he had devised his Plain Bob Royal, Grandsire Triples and Stedman Caters. How ironic it would be if it were the bells that were to bring about the destruction of the church itself.

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It was an overloaded Pickwick who finally emerged from Roe's printshop on King's Parade and made his way back to the Castle Inn near Parker's Piece. Much of the rest of the afternoon was to be spent compiling notes and carefully packing the numerous engravings – and of course the 1574 map – or so he thought.

It was not to work out that way. On entering his room it became apparent that his return had preceded the arrival of the chamber maid: the bed was still in the dishevelled state in which he had left it, the water in the washbasin even chillier now than it had been earlier, and the chamberpot – though invisible under the bed – had obviously not been emptied.

Pickwick pondered; he did not want to cause a fuss, but something must be amiss. He set out to track down the landlord, but of the landlord there was no sign. He did however reacquaint himself with the old servant he had met on that first night in the inn who did not seem at all surprised at the situation.

"We have great difficulty getting girls to do the work", he confided. "During term time they find more lucrative employment in the colleges, or amongst the college gentlemen – if you get my meaning. When the term is done they get desperate and come round seeking jobs here. I get to know them all and hear their stories". It took but little prompting for him to reveal some of his findings

"Take Emma – the girl that should have done your room; she's an orphan girl about sixteen years old with brothers living at Newmarket, Stetchworth and Dullingham and a sister with Mrs Paris at Newmarket. She was in service with Mr John Robinson, a training groom at Newmarket but left there on account of a quarrel – or so she told us. But then one of our guests from Newmarket way told us that Emma had a sweetheart called Stebbings who trained horses but he'd broken their engagement & she'd stormed out, determined to have her revenge on him. She came to Cambridge to a stay with relation named Ellsden or Elliston who she thought lived in Green Street, but when she got there she found they'd moved. Well she got herself cheap lodgings, stayed out late and inevitably got into bad company; she's now living with a young man she'd met out at Barnwell, at least she was yesterday, heaven knows where she is now – Spinning House most like!

"A lot of our girls have the same story; like Elizabeth; she's an educated girl – she can even read – most of them can't - and was a scholar in Barnwell Sunday School. But then she went off to the Stourbridge Fair and like dozens of young girls before her she was seduced by one of the fair men. She thought they were to get engaged, but come the end of the fair and he'd gone off. So she moved in with her younger sister and they'd both earned their living by prostitution till she was picked up by the Proctors and thrown into the Spinning House. The cold, dank and depressing cell brought her to her senses and we hope that she may be mending her ways.

"Then there's Emily; her parents live in Blue Lion Yard but she wouldn't stay with them and has had lodgings in various places - in Portugal Place, Clement Lane and now Slaughter House Lane where I know she receives visits from Gentlemen, but only University Gentlemen. She's lived in sin for three years but was kept by one individual for two years of that time. She had a child before she was seventeen but it's provided for by its father, from Haileybury College who pays 5/- a week and her mother has the charge of it. Her sister, Eliza has had two children and been in the Spinning House. She came here and said she wanted a job because she was in debt to the amount of £3 to Mrs Pawley in Round Church Lane & she wished to get some clothes out of pawn. So we took her on but then she was found on the floor in a fit - she said she'd been kicked in the body by a Proctor's man. Unfortunately these fits kept recurring became so frequent and violent that we had to turn her out – now we will never accept a girl who has any history of fits.

"Saddest of all is Susan – a lovely girl, despite her temper – and she worked well. But then her sight started to fail; she saved up and bought some spectacles but they didn't do any good and her growing blindness caused considerable problems: twice she set herself on fire, so we had to let her go. Her father shows strangers around the University and now she goes with

him; I believe that some of the visitors can be very generous to her – though as you know Cambridge is full of other characters who prey on the gullibility of tourists"

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Conversation at the back of the Castle Inn was disrupted by a call from inside the building that sent Pickwick's companion scuttling off. In his absence Pickwick cast his eyes around the variety of old wooden structures that packed themselves into the inn yard. There were the stables, bottle stores, sheds full of antiquated furniture of one sort or another and a ladder that led up to rooms above. He was about to explore when the old servant returned and demanded just what he was doing, sneaking up to the maids' rooms – they were not for him; why if a gentleman like himself wanted some female company he could guide him to far more congenial young ladies.

Pickwick flushed and stammered, embarrassed on the one hand to be suspected of such activities, annoyed that he should be suspected of such activities and at the same time faintly aware that such activities might just be the sort of thing to regale his younger companions in the Pickwick Club.

But then the servant broke into a smile, and he could see he was being teased. This seemed to break down any reserve between the two men and they adjourned to a corner of one of the outbuildings where two decrepit armchairs provided a surprisingly comfortable resting-place from which they could observe the world of the inn yard and yet not be seen.

And from here old Goodlad from Girton – for that was the name to which he answered, being a combination of his surname and place of birth - commenced his analysis of the problems of the modern young women, of whom he had met large numbers.

Often the girls came from caring families, but the reality of life meant that in poor parishes such as Girton those families just could not sustain large numbers of children. It was essential that as soon as they reached an appropriate age the girls went out to find work, and thus be able to contribute to the family's income. Yet whatever she sent never seemed to be enough.

Many girls worked long hours, lived respectable and religious lives and having been trained in the basics of domestic at the Castle they went on to other employment in respectable homes. But many did not: he had seen it happen time and time again. Come Midsummer or Stourbridge Fair with their excitements and drinking booths and what few coppers the girls had saved would soon be squandered; there would inevitably be some fair men waiting to take unfair advantage of their naivety. He'd comforted many a weeping girl in the cold light of dawn as she had unfolded details of her misadventures in the damp grass and dark courtyards off Newmarket Road.

Of course there were the rebels, wayward and uncontrollable girls who had been turned out of their own homes but for these he often had great sympathy. Family life was not now what it once had been. These days if one parent died it was essential for the other to remarry as soon as possible. But so often an adolescent daughter found it hard to live peacefully with a stepfather or stepmother, especially if they brought their own offspring with them or when a new, second family began to emerge. Then he had known cases when the original parent had died and another remarriage taken place leaving the original family with two new guardians, neither of whom they knew. At times like these a thirteen-year-old girl would inevitably pack

up her few belongings and leave, not infrequently bringing with her tales of incest with her stepfather or one of his sons.

Despite the large families and frequency of births in the cottages many of the country girls were very innocent about sexual matters. Not so Cambridge undergraduates; for many of them brought up to life above stairs the maids at home had been fair game, but warned of their danger; here in Cambridge they could perfect their seduction techniques all too easily. Nor was pregnancy the only danger; should a girl fall pray to any other illness or disease then she would try and effect a cure for herself, often resorting to the various old maids with their quack remedies. But even these took money, and to raise that money the girl would turn to selling or pawning what clothes she had accumulated and debts could soon multiply. Alone, hungry, frightened – and now with her virginity lost – there was for many just one easy way to make money, and another recruit was added to the army of prostitutes plying their trade.

There ought to be some body to help break the vicious circle. Even now there was talk of a Female Refuge being established to rescue them from the ever-open doors of the Spinning House or the new Union workhouse being built on Mill Road – & if Pickwick wanted a charity to support he could find few better.

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If a domestic servant was to make a success of her own domestic life she needed guidance. Goodlad from Girton had met many young ladies and had his own hints as to ways they could manage their economy – though Pickwick couldn't help reflecting that they would have come more naturally from a Goodlass.

"When they leave to get married – as some of them do – I always impress on them the importance of cleanliness, especially in the bedroom. I've noticed here that their beds are seldom ever sufficiently exposed to the atmosphere; they roll the covering off and on again, without even separating them, and they return to their couch with the same bad air enclosed around them, in which they have slept the preceding night. This is one certain way of producing infection, which you cannot be surprised should attack them under such circumstances.

"They'll say 'I have not time to attend to all this trifling', but would it take up more of her time, if, immediately when she arose, she shook out singly every article of her bed-clothes over the back of a chair, tossed up her bed, and left it to rise while she kindled the fire? And by that time, if she took care to open her window, her bed would be sufficiently purified, and she could return to it at night with comfort, and exemption from all injurious effects. But allowing that it would take her a little more time, would it not be well bestowed, if it kept out the infection it might otherwise have imbibed? Above all they should avoid laying any spare blanket, or any article of clothing between the bed and the bedstead, for by so doing, it is utterly impossible that their beds can ever be sufficiently purified.

"I tell them never to omit mopping under the bed every morning and removing every particle of dust as quickly as it collects - especially as in small dwellings the bedroom is frequently not far removed from the fire. Then if she has any carpets near the bed she should never neglect to shake them out every day; half a moment will suffice for this purpose – but they seldom listen.

“I urge them to look to their appearance - a button, a string, or any little thing wanting to your dress gives you an untidy look, which is so prejudicial to your appearance. They say it’s not worth the effort: ‘I shall only burn more candle than my work is worth’. But then I remind them how many hours of candle-light they so often waste by letting it burn so low as to heat the candlestick before they raise it up. You will be startled when I tell you that I have no doubt but at the very least one eighth part of every candle is so wasted; and by too close snuffing, which always makes it run over, and consequently last a shorter time. I see them carrying candles without ever guarding it from the air by their hand and tell them they’d find at the end of the week, a greater difference in expenditure of that article than they could suppose – probably enough as would purchase a tea-cake for their Sunday evening repast.

“Modern girls have little appreciation of the cost of items these days; you should see what they waste: I have too frequently witnessed them leaving soap in water till it’s too soft to be used. I tell them what you think useless pieces, should on no account be flung away or burnt (the too general practice,) but always bear in mind that every atom is of use. Have a bag at hand to receive what those who collect for paper makers will gladly give you pins or many little necessary articles for. Gun makers will purchase old shoes as they cannot polish their work without them and woollen shreds if not of use to gardeners to nail up fruit trees, will make iron or kettle holders, or clean tins with the addition of tallow that cannot be used up in the candlestick.

“In short nothing should be wasted; nothing should be burnt. There is no necessity to make your house untidy by preserving all these things, for every thing may be laid by in its proper place. Paper may be filed on a needle and thread, and preserved till wanted, pack-thread wound up, and everything else in the same order”.

As he regaled Pickwick with these hints, gleaned from a lifetime of penny-pinching, Goodlad continued to scan the inn yard. He was always on the lookout for a new guest or a less welcome visitor perhaps intent on purloining a piece of the mass of what Pickwick now realised was not discarded furniture but the very basis of the inn servant’s future prosperity.

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Goodlad from Girton had special advice to servant girls who were about to marry and have to run a home of their own.

“I tell them: when you are fortunate enough to keep a pig you will find that everything must be made the most of, even to the very skimmings of your pans, which you are too apt to throw into that general consumer, the fire. Apple-peelings and cores, the kernels of plums, acorns when they can be procured, as well as many productions, such as sow thistles, in short almost anything that is green are all great helps in fattening a pig. But remember that regular feeding, and a clean bed, will go a great way in this affair. You should always give it something three times a day, and where you can contrive it you should give it food as dry as possible in one trough, and what it drinks in another. It will fatten quicker, and be much firmer by this management. Never give it your potato peelings raw, but let them be boiled and well skimmed, and if you do the same to your cabbage stalks and leaves, your turnip and carrot peelings and tops and all other vegetables, you will find how much better your pig gets on - and particularly if you added a handful of coarse-ground meal flour, or refuse corn.

“You can get grains too from the brewers or from anyone that does not use them. The farmers will thank you for collecting the weeds from their fields, and when they see you so industrious, they might possibly help you with a peck or two of beans, or dross corn. I have no doubt by this management that almost any poor family might feed a pig to a killable size - and think what comfort and plenty you would enjoy when you came to reap the fruits of this attention.

“I stress to the girls that she must make every article of food go as far as it possibly can, and also to improve it. It’s fortunate, that that which the cottager is the fondest of, and what to hard-working people is very wholesome, namely pork, is the cheapest and most easily procured of any other animal food. But do they always make the most of this? No. How often are you annoyed on passing a cottage, with the smell of bones burning? This ought never to be the case, for bones will digest over and over again, when placed in an iron pan with a little water, covered up close, and set by the side, or on the top of a very slow fire. It they let it simmer it will produce a soup more nutritious than you could possibly imagine.

“Some people extol the virtues of these new ‘digesters’ to make the most of all bones, waste meat and so on. But you don’t need such gadgets. Just collect all the bones, fat and scraps, that you would otherwise throw away; break the bones as small as you can, (which will make them yield better), put them into a pan with no more water than will cover them. Then let them simmer all the evening and all night. In the morning when the soup is cold, you remove all the fat from it. This you should put by in a clean cup, and it will serve to fry pancakes, potatoes, or any other thing you may have to prepare in that manner.

“Next you should drain the soup from the dregs at the bottom, and set it by while you move on to the next stage in the recipe. Tie up a teacup full of pease in a bag, leaving them a little room to increase - they will probably take some time before they are sufficiently softened. Then pound them in the bag till they are quite a paste and put them into your soup with a little onion, pepper, a leaf or two of mint - if you like the taste - and let all boil up well together. If it is not then as good as you could wish, add a spoonful of made mustard when you take it off the fire, and have some nice crisp toast cut in small squares in the basin in which you pour it.

“You will scarcely believe it till you have tried it, how many times the bones of beef, and particularly the head, may be so stewed, and yet afford a tolerable soup with the addition of barley and herbs instead of peas

“I tell them: ‘Your husband when returning cold and hungry from his day's work, if he finds this quite ready on his arrival, will probably make it suffice for his supper with the addition of a little bread and cheese. What a pleasure it would be to you, whilst you sit enjoying your tea comfortably beside him, to think that by a little management you had saved the expense of one meal of animal food, and yet that your husband should not feel its loss. You will be amply repaid by it, for any little trouble you have taken’.”

Perhaps, thought Pickwick, but it would not be a meal to repeat too often if she wanted to keep him happy!

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Pickwick pretended to take notice as Goodlad described other recipes for the impoverished young bride, starting with broth

“Whenever you make broth, you should be sure to put nothing into it at first but the meat and some shelled barley; let it boil an hour or two according to the quantity of your meat. The night before would be still more convenient, that it might have sufficient time to cool. Then you set it out in a safe place for an hour or two, till you can take the fat entirely off, which readers the broth more wholesome and saves you the skimmings for other purposes. Otherwise if leave it till you put in the herbs, you are obliged to throw it away, or leave it on

the broth, when it is very apt to disagree & besides you lose the flavour of the herbs, which ought never to be added till the last hour. You may put in small pieces of turnip, carrots, onions or chives with a little thyme and marjoram, parsley and marigold which give your broth a good taste. Potatoes are best added when you eat it, if you like these better than bread, which is a saving of the latter. A little piece of beef or mutton, if done very slowly, makes a cheap and nice dinner in this way, and coarse pieces are as good as the best when stewed till they are tender".

"Another dish in which a little meat goes a good way, is an Irish stew, and which, when properly made, is most excellent, either baked or boiled. The best way of preparing it, is to cut your meat, (which ought not to be too fat), in small pieces, then season it a little with pepper, and salt, and place it in layers in your pan or dish, intermixed with layers of potatoes (peeled and sliced) and a little sliced onion to your taste. If baked, put only as much water as will cover it, and have some ready boiling when it comes out of the oven, that you may add to it, if necessary. Shake some pepper on the top of all, and an hour and a half, or two hours will bake it, according to its size, or the heat of the oven. If you prefer this dish boiled you may prepare it exactly in the same way, except that you put more water to it, and let it simmer very slowly over a low fire, or it will be very apt to burn, which you must prevent by stirring it often. A pound of sliced lean beef would make a dinner for a large family, prepared in this way".

Everybody ate bread, and many a woman would bake her own. But there was a common fault: "However fierce their oven is, they put their bread immediately into it, and often burn the top quite black, while the bottom is soft and colourless, instead of what I call striking the oven by shutting it up quite close as soon as the ashes are out, for five minutes at least, or while they are making up their bread. If they would but observe to do this the oven would get regularly heated, and the bread much better baked. They should also heap it up close together when it first comes out, and cover it with a clean cloth, and something thicker over it, by which means the bread would be much more moist and mellow. I tell them when the yeast is flat, a little boiled potatoes, added either to that, or put in the bread, is a great improvement to the rising.

"And while they have the over heated I suggest they make tea-cakes. They are very nice when made light: it requires little more than good management to make them, setting the dough very light with a little milk and an egg or two, and a very few carraway seeds. They should be baked in a very quick oven, and for a very short time. Some women colour them with a spoonful of saffron tea, which makes them look nice; but this must not be too freely used as too strong a preparation of it is poisonous.

"I tell them they might earn a little money if they could but establish a reputation for making these and some proper sausages. These are easy to make: just a few pounds of the small pieces of what is left in cutting up a pig are easily procured, if you have none of your own. You shred it very fine, picking out all the skins and stringy parts, and mixing the fat and lean in nearly equal proportions, then add a sufficient quantity of pepper and salt, and have ready some well-dried and finely-powdered sage leaves, of which you must shake in a little, but not too much. You can easily procure the skins to put them in from any person who is not using them themselves. Tie them up the usual size and make them look as clean and neat as possible. In short, there are many ways that an industrious woman could make a comfortable addition to her husband's earnings".

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Part of the problem of hanging on to servants was marriage - and a family was all too often on the way before the wedding was solemnised. Indeed at Girton a few years earlier the minister had been driven to desperate measures. He had arranged for a notice to be printed:

TO THE YOUNG WOMEN OF GIRTON PARISH

Having observed with great concern that many of the young women of this parish when they come to be married, are already big with child, and wishing to put a stop to a practice offensive to decency, morality, and often destructive to their own happiness, I hereby promise to every young woman of sober behaviour belonging to the Parish who shall hereafter be married in this church while under the age of twenty-five years that I will, upon the birth of her first child (if that shall happen nine months after the day of the marriage) give her 10s. for ye Christing Dinner and also a silver plate of 10s value, to be worn upon the breast every Sunday when she comes to Church, with this Inscription, THE REWARD OF CHASTITY
But Goodlad could recollect that he had seen many of these badges on Sunday mornings!

When the inevitable happened he had his own advice to the new mother: When an infant is newly-born, you should never omit giving it a tea-spoonful of castor oil; it prevents many complaints that they are subject to and may be be often repeated with great safety when their bowels are disordered. I by no means recommend magnesia, which lies cold and heavy on the infant's stomach, and should never be given alone.
In case of eruption, as measles, chicken-pox and so on, if the complaint come out freely, a very small quantity of weak onion-tea often assists it - but you must be very careful, for it is rather powerful when too strong. Never be persuaded to give an infant any sleeping-medicine for you may depend on it, if they are cross, they only want a little aperient medicine, and I know of none more efficient than caster oil. You add to their uneasiness by giving them what only lulls them for a few hours, as it confines their bowels when they ought to be relaxed.

In the hooping cough, nothing relieves the patient so much as slight emetics, but of these I speak with caution, as they are dangerous to tamper with. You cannot, however do harm by rubbing the chest every night with some oily substance, and keeping it warm with flannel. I also believe that the sugar and vinegar is very serviceable in this complaint, as it relieves the chest.

As agues are so prevalent here, the most frugal and ready remedy, you will be surprised to hear, is the snuff of the candle. Strange as it may appear, it is now frequently used with great success. You may mix it with a little honey, treacle, or some other sweet that may disguise it, and you need not tell your patient what it is. Bark and snake root, mixed in beer or wine, is another remedy; but the most certain cure is the quinine, bark, which now most druggists know how to make up in proper quantities. It is, however, a very dear medicine. Cayenne pepper, or a large quantity of ginger taken in warm beer or spirits, often stops it at first.

Never neglect a cold. A number of complaints are brought on by such neglect that might very easily be avoided. If you find yourself the least bit chilly, go immediately and put on a warm shawl, or some other addition to your dress and keep it on till you go to bed. You need not be afraid you will miss the warmth in the morning, for if you have taken it in time, you will feel no more of your chills and will probably have prevented a heavy cold. If this additional clothing does not remove the chills before the evening, take a good handful of bran, and let it boil in two quarts of water, down to a pint, then strain it and sweeten it with coarse sugar, honey, or treacle, and drink it quite hot when in bed. A treacle posset is also very good for the cold, taken in the same manner.

If your cold turns to a cough recollect the ever-ready remedy of sugar and vinegar; but what you sometimes fail in is, the not stirring it sufficiently in the cup by the fire, which makes it candy, and stick to the bottom, when it ought to be all smooth and clear as honey fresh from the comb. You know it takes three large spoonsful of coarse sugar to two of vinegar. Do not take more than a tea-spoon-full at a time, but repeat it frequently. You will seldom know what a cough is, if you apply this remedy very early. Liquorice-root (which you might easily

have in your garden),sliced and bruised and boiled in a quart of water down to half-a-pint, is a very good remedy for a settled cough; as is also horehound tea.

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Should a cold develop into a sore throat Goodlad advised immediate action: “The very first symptom you find of a sore throat, gargle it with cold water, and repeat it frequently; this often prevents an attack of this complaint. A piece of flannel with some hartshorn and oil should directly be applied to the neck, and if that is not at hand goose-grease is equally serviceable – although it smells very disagreeably. Even your stocking put round your neck at night will sometimes remove it. When the throat is relaxed, get an ounce of' tanners’ bark, and boil it in three pints of water down to one pint, and add a spoonful of powdered allum: this is a very good gargle till the throat is ulcerated and then you must have something acid. Sage leaves boiled well in water make a very good gargle; also a tablespoonful of port wine, one of vinegar, and one of water, with a little loaf sugar is often a good preventative.

Several varieties of tea featured in the old man’s remedies: “For a sudden pain in the stomach, you cannot have any thing more simple than a little ginger tea, made very hot. Pepper mixed also, either the oil of it, or on a lump of sugar, or the plant itself made into tea, is often very efficacious”. Hop tea taken the first thing in the morning, was very good for strengthening the stomach while hot camomile tea could be mixed to make a home-made medicine. “You have only to procure two or three ounces of salts, which you can purchase very cheap, dissolve them in a quart of boiling camomile tea, covered close till cold. Then put the mixture into a quart bottle, and take a wine-glass-full every morning while you require it” And you could even just drink it: “An agreeable beverage can be secured by filling up your teapot, when done with, with boiling water and letting it stand to cool. Balm, mint and other herbs that have a pleasant flavour make very agreeable tea, to use occasionally, and are very cooling.”

When stronger medicine was required his advice was to procure half-a-pound of French plums and an ounce or two of senna; stew them together in an earthen pipkin on a very slow fire, for an hour or two; then strain it and take a tea-cup-full of the juice. You put the remainder by in a bottle well corked up till required - it will not keep long. This medicine was often given to children, and in olden days people never omitted giving them every morning a spoonful of a mixture of treacle, two ounces of cream of tartar, two ounces of flower of sulphur, and one ounce of wormseed. “Children, in general, are very fond of this as they only taste the treacle,” he added. And when there was treacle to be had it could even substitute for beer, which was a greater luxury than the generality of the poor could accomplish. Boil the treacle and water together, and when cool, set it to ferment with a little yeast, bottle it and in a day or two it would be fit for use

With all that hot water bubbling on the kitchen stove then scalds or burns were inevitable. Here too Goodlad had advice. “I, by accident, found out the most simple and pleasant remedy for a scald or burn, that is, putting the part afflicted into the hottest water you can bear your hand in (an infant, of course, could not bear it so warm) and keeping it there for a considerable time, adding to the heat of the water as it cools, till, on your taking it out, you feel no return of the pain. If so, you return it to the water again, and add again to the heat of it. You feel no pain in this case, but in the first plunge, which you must not mind being very severe.

“If the skin is broken, put on some of the following ointment, which you can easily make in summer: - to a pound of sweet hog's lard add a quarter of a pound of mutton suet melted, and poured in a little at a time, till all is well mixed, with a table-spoonful of salt. Get all the rose leaves you can, and put some in every day, working it well with your hands, for as long as you can get rose leaves. Then put it into a jar tied close down, and set it in a kettle of water,

stirring it now and then till in a liquid state, taking care that no water gets in. Then strain it through a fine sieve into a basin, and, when settled from the lees, pour it of into small vessels for use: you may make a quarter of the quantity, which will last a long time."

Pickwick was not sure he would trust such remedies, but then he could afford to buy professional medical advice; servant girls could not. As Goodlad said: "I always tell them that by a proper knowledge of these simples, and taking complaints in time, you may often spare yourself a doctor's bill, which in general is a serious consideration".

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Goodlad's advice to the young girls training to be servants at the Castle Inn was obviously appreciated; he showed Pickwick a letter just received from one of his proteges now in service. Though the writer could write, she obviously could not write well. It read:
MISTER GOODLAD
It given me grate plesur to noe you air able to make out my and ritin which I was afraid you wouldn't do it. missus see me riting the other day, lor If she only node I rote to u. and wanted to no what I could posibel have to rite about. and sed the lernin to rite was the ruing of girls in servis as it took up all ther spare time scribblin to won relation and another. my spare time might be put in my eye and I shouldnt see the wus for it I reckin. as If we had no feelins of human natur in our bussums. and she also sed that edication for the pore was unnessary they done verry well without it when she was yung -I thot to myself she spoke from experence as I happens to know more of her than she thinks I do. she was a dress maker wons and if she was served by them she worked for as she serves me she must had a nice time on it.

She is now a fine lady and crowshays and nits pusses and goes a distric visitin and gives trax where a loff of bred would be a good deel more wellcomer. but I says nothin. Wen things get to there wust tha mend, it is eye time mine did.

A bed this morning at 1 up agin at 5 in order to get the days wash done by myself. fustin secondin bilin renchin and hanging out. counterpans kwilts blankits cheets towls tabl cloths musling and other dresses winder curtings blinds andsettera and dyin iernin and harein hoft nixt day. all the rest of the lining put out as I was told by missus when she hired me. to get out of the steam missus and the yung ladis went to a grate meetin to mansipate the aferkan niggers from slavery. I has jest answered the street door and tumbled over I dont know how manny things in the passeg its called the hall and tho tis not large enuff to swing a cat in there is two chairs a umbrello stand a hat and cloak rail and a wether glass and all this trash to the inconwenence of every body because it is genteel. Our hous has a green before it I means a laun with palens and a gate with two postes. On one post there is wrote for visiters and on the other for servents but the fun of the thing is there is only won bell for both. I asted Albert wot it meant and he laft and said he beleeved twas ginteel and that was all he knowed about it.

Jist as I wos saying of this up drives the carrag hullow says I whats in the wind now. Missus, says he, is goin out to make her usal mornin calls why says I she isn't out of bed yet thats it says he what says I why its ordered afore its wanted to be driv up and down afore the house that the nayburs may see we keeps won. dont ye see appearance is every thing now a days Susan and if you can but nak a show out of dors no matter for indors. Well I never. Ive sin a good deal in my time but that beats all. I asted for a holliday a little while back and wasnt there a bobbry kicked up hadnt I bin out ofting enuff wasnt I out only a few sundys ago atween dinner and tee besides what could I want with a holliday comforble as I wos in my plais. however it was settled that I should go out after the mornins wurk was dun if I could get any won to tak my plais ther was nobody would so I stopt in and was asted nex day if I didnt feel quite as well as if I had bin gaddin about.

missusses can go out when they pleases and therefore dont feek the inconvenance of stoppin in thats not the case with us. Won sundy mornin I asted if I mite be aloud to go to chapel but missus sed certanly not ther is a servants pue in the church and while you air in our servis we expects you to atend there. I wonce read in a book that some grate man findin another man who had lived in a sitty thurty years without leavin it offered to give him lots of munny if he would keep in the sitty another year he couldnt do it he didnt mind keepin in himself but he couldnt stand being kept in by anybody els. thats sactly as tis with servents and missuses and is wot I has to complane of. howsomever I sees no chanse of a holladay now as we air going to have a large party of I dont know how manny peepel. there will be a rair scrowgin and skweegin to get many into our house I tak it. but their is to be sumthin done extrornory which I will tell you all a bout in my nex letter to mak roome - the bell as rung twice - but my feet is so swelled with runnin up and down stares and standin to wash that I hardly feels capble of anserin it and as I dont do it so quick as I would I am sure to be blowd up as their is compny in the parlur.

Yours fexnately, Susan Crick

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Eventually escaping from Goodlad and his tales of below-stairs poverty Pickwick spent a convivial evening at the Castle Inn being regaled with tales of another side of the hardship of financial life – the plight of the banker during that disastrous Christmas of 1825. Pickwick recalled it well.

With so many banks then issuing their own notes there was ample opportunity for criminality and fraud. Indeed in 1819 three parcels of bank notes from various of the Cambridge banks – Mortlock, Hollick, Skrine - had been stolen from the great coat of James Eccles, the man employed to transport them to and from London, whilst he was refreshing himself in the bar of the Flower Pot public house in Bishopsgate Street, London. Even though the numbers of the notes had been recorded there was never any hope of tracing them. Then in 1822 there'd been a number of forgeries of Foster's banknotes in circulation and the bank had issued a reward of £100. This had proved effective, a parcel of 159 forged notes was found dumped beside the road from Saffron Walden to Audley End; a woman was arrested sentenced to death – though this was commuted.

But this was happening throughout the country, and not only to provincial banks but to the great London banks as well. It had got to such a state of affairs that in 1825 London bankers decided it was time for drastic action. They withdrew all their one and two-pound notes in circulation and substituted gold sovereigns.

But now those people whose job it was to transport money from London to the provinces found their job much more difficult. For gold weighed far more than paper and not only was the journey far slower it was far more dangerous – for the countryside was in a state of panic.

Those with banknotes rushed to swap paper for gold. And this led to banking chaos. In Yorkshire the bank of Wentworth and Co suddenly stopped payment. & soon a hundred other country bankers fell victim to the tragedy – the Southampton bank of Kellow and Company, the Hinckley bank of Sansomme and company & the Peterborough bank of Simpson and White amongst them. All of this impacted on other banks, who held notes the others had issued. In Cambridge the banks of Thomas Fisher, John Mortlock, Hollick and Foster stopped payment. University colleges and graduates beat a path to the bankers' doors – but not to withdraw money but to offer it, tendering large sums of cash if that would help avert collapse. But this help was turned down – it had no prospect of working

In Wisbech Gurneys and Co. managed after a great effort to obtain sufficient aid from the Bank of England to enable them to stand their ground. Another Wisbech banker, William Peckover, visited his wealthy friends to borrow enough to survive. Mr.Charrington, a wealthy man residing in Fleet Fen, near Gedney Hill, went the bank on the North Brink, with a view to drawing his cash – but he hardly liked to make known his wish so asked for just a part. When Mr. William Peckover said "Thee can have it all, if thee likes" Charrington was so satisfied that he said "No, you may keep it". For there in the bank were a large number of farm sacks brimming over with gold coins under a banner which read "Sufficient for all and a Peck-over".

Mr. Boultbee, corn merchant and banker, in the Old Market, Wisbech tried a similar trick. He had a bushel screwed to his counter, the wrong way upwards, and its bottom covered with gold sovereigns & guineas which he asked a strong man to lift. Of course he could not do so, and the people thought it must be filled with gold, and were satisfied. But not all could survive; James Hills' Bank stopped trading and rumours spread that a large iron chest had been removed surreptitiously from the building containing gold that had been secretly kept back. After obtaining information as to its whereabouts from a discharged servant, and great trouble had been taken to trace the treasure box, it was at last produced in court. It was a wooden chest and it was very heavy: the anticipations of the value of its contents being correspondingly increased. It was opened in breathless silence and found to contain, not gold, but a collection of fossils belonging to one of the ladies of the household! Mr. Hill came out of the ordeal without any imputation on his honour, and subsequently re-embarked in business, but was not successful as a merchant and removed to London, where he followed journalism.

But one of the those gathered at the Castle had personal knowledge of the banking crisis that had nearly driven him to suicide.

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The mood in the Castle Inn turned sombre as various members of the company recalled their own involvement in the financial crisis of Christmas 1825 caused by London banks withdrawing one and two-pound notes.

One had been left holding a large number of small notes issued by Messrs Simpson and White, bankers of Peterborough. "I was amongst more than 130 creditors who packed a meeting to consider our position. The Earl Fitzwilliam himself turned out so we elected him to the chair, Lord Milton and the Dean of Peterborough were there also. There was no doubt that the bank was technically overstretched to the tune of something over £9,000 – but the bankers Simpson and White between them had private property worth £50,000. So was it wise to push for bankruptcy which would doubtless result in numerous law suits dragging on for years and years when if the largest creditors – including Mr Atkinson who was owed £1,000 – would just hold their nerve then things could be resolved. In any case in a bankruptcy nothing was ever paid in less than five or six months and by then the crisis may have been resolved. The bank were offering to guarantee to give us cash for our £5 notes on the 18th January and redeem the £10 and £20 notes by the middle of February. And in the meantime they would pay 5% interest to creditors. It was all very plausible and we really could see no alternative. Earl Fitzwilliam, who possessed very many of the small banknotes said he would guarantee not to try and cash them, and if the bankers deposited the title deeds of their estates as guarantees, then us present would support them. But it would only take one small creditor to panic and all could still have been lost".

And in Huntingdon that is what one man did. The banks there managed somehow to change paper into gold but although they were supposed to be worthless the sight of piles of banknotes prominently displayed in the window of Messrs Pasheller's Bank prompted some

villains to smash a pane of glass to force entry on a Saturday night. But they were disappointed, they found nothing to steal.

John Eaden from Royston had seen it from the other side of the counter; he enraptured his companions with his own recollection of the events:

"It was on 11th December 1825 and seeing the most dreadful panic in the London Money market with everyone ruining to draw their balances out & several of the most eminent Bankers suspending payment that we became very anxious to provide against a run on our Bank, which we feared to be extremely probable. We decided that Henry & myself should go to London on the Monday - 12th December which we did, and as soon as we arrived we waited on Mr Lloyd. We proposed to lodge securities of undoubted character with him, that in case of need, we might be allowed to draw for the amount they would cover. But to our surprise & consternation, he not only refused to advance upon these securities, but refused to turn our Bills into Cash – we returned full of disappointment & anxiety, but still hoping the event we dreaded might not be so near as we expected.

"Tuesday 13th December passed over without any particular symptoms of public uneasiness - as did Wednesday 14th- on which day Mr Barker & myself attended at Royston as usual. But soon after Skrines Bank opened on Thursday 15th it was beset by a crowd of workman from Kings, who were alarmed by a Letter their Foreman had received from London informing him that the London Banks were breaking by wholesale, and advising him to induce the workmen to get Sovereigns for their Country notes. This alarm immediately spread over the whole town like wildfire, and all the Banks, were immediately run upon - they being generally unprepared, the small Stock of Gold & Bank they possessed became soon exhausted. At 12 o'clock Mr Barker set off for London for a supply, he returned on Friday 16th, with £5000 in bank. When we opened at nine o'clock as usual the Bank was beset by an immense crowd, and we had to send for constables to keep the rabble from rushing in. This situation continued all day, with an immense mass in the street that it was almost impassable.

"Saturday 17th commenced with as large a number as the day before but we observed they were people of the lowest class - scarcely a respectable man among them. Hollick & Company's Bank which had suspended their payments were expected to resume that morning - but they failed to do so. The public being disappointed in this, added to the general panic, as well to the pressure on us- these two days the run was at its height. We were at out wit's end."

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The weekend of 17th-18th of December 1825 had been the most worrying John Eaden had known; so many people were besieging his Royston bank demanding gold in exchange for paper banknotes that the constables guarding the doors were hard pressed to maintain order. And inside the bank the supply of gold sovereigns was rapidly dwindling.

"On the Sunday we consulted together & determined that Mr Barker would go to London to make further arrangements with our Bankers, leaving me to hold the shop. Next day the crowds were somewhat diminished but the queue lasted all day – & Barker did not return. On the Tuesday the run considerably abated, so much so that we dismissed the Constables – and for the first time there were no applicants when we shut up. There was still no news from my partner

"On Wednesday morning I took the decision not to call for the constables - they come in pretty fast when summoned - and I got through the day pretty well. Finally Mr Barker returned from London with a further supply of Bank. The crisis seemed to have peaked; Thursday and Friday saw fewer people demanding their money – perhaps because most of them had already taken it out. But I was still worried about Saturday when the country people

would travel in – people that had gone home last week without getting Cash for their Notes. Needless to say there were several of them, but very few Townspeople and this day closed what we called 'the run'. Sunday was Christmas Day and we felt somewhat more merry than we had felt a day or two before. Boxing Day was very quiet, and a dead calm succeeded the violent storm.

"But we learned a severe lesson - the impression of which can never be obliterated. The painful anxiety underwent during this Flood of Adversity, far exceeded any thing of the sort I was ever before called upon to endure. My spirits sunk under it – and I was indebted much to the members of my Family for their sympathy, activity & energy by every one displayed, the unexampled kindness of our friends which - added to the tormenting difficulties by which we were surrounded - quite overpowered my feelings, and rendered me incapable of exertion. May such a calamity never over-take me again, nor any one that belongs to me."

With similar sentiments being expressed by bankers throughout the country it had also proved a trying period for the Prime Minister, Lord Liverpool and the Chancellor of the Exchequer. They urged the Bank of England to reintroduce one and two-pound notes which could be distributed to country banks. Soon banknotes were being issued wholesale with clerks busy from eight in the morning to nine at night. At the same time the Government instructed the Mint to produce more gold sovereigns. By getting their men to work overtime – right through Sunday – and pushing their new machinery to the limit they were able to produce some 700,000 sovereigns a week. And this proved a profitable exercise for the price of bullion had fallen and every ounce of gold coined brought the Bank a profit.

Then on the Friday 150,000 sovereigns arrived from the Continent and were immediately paid into the Bank of England by the house of Rothschild. Almost as quickly as they came in they went out again, one small bank alone despatched no less than 90,000 sovereigns to a provincial banker. But the crisis was averted and the financial world breathed again.

"That was the time old Bill Shields died, weren't it", chipped in a voice from the other side of the room – "not that he died of shortage of money. You've heard of him, ain't yer". But nobody had, and so the tale was told.

"William Shields was a well-known character – a bit like Jemmy Gordon. He lived in a miserably habitation in one of the extreme parts of the town, called Cambridge Place, from which he would emerge about ten or eleven in the morning and find his way home in the evening as well he could, almost always in a state of inebriety. That December he had been pursuing his traditional occupation at that time of year, collecting Christmas boxes as one of the "University Wakes" - which in fact occupied him a considerable portion of the year. One night his neighbours heard him come home unusually early and then heard him groaning in his room. They were so alarmed they forced open a window to get inside and on fetching a candle a scene of utmost misery presented itself." The speaker now had the attention of his hearers and took this opportunity to pause to refresh his glass.

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As the neighbours forced their way into the hovel in Cambridge Place a scene of the utmost degree of misery presented itself. There was Bill Shields – "character" – sitting on an only chair in a complete and almost insensible state of intoxication, and the room was extremely filthy from the effects of his drunkenness. He had nothing to lay upon but a pillow and a piece of rug on the boards, and another small piece of rug to cover him. He was very cold.

His finders sent immediately for the parish-officer who ordered a horse and cart and had him taken to the poor-house. As he was in the cart Bill asked where he was going to, and being told to Barnwell poor-house, said that was wrong, he belonged to Great St Andrew. He

complained much of cold, and said he was dying; but expressed a satisfaction that he was going to the poor-house, as he should like to die on a bed!

On being taken into the poor-house he instantly called our for "a shilling's worth of brandy and water". On being asked if he knew where he was he said he did not. The governor, in a joking manner, said he always had money first, upon which Bill threw down half a crown. After being there some time, and put before a good fire, a warm mess was made for him; he said it was very good, but it was not "brandy and water". He was afterwards put into a warm bed, and every attention shown to him. In the morning his bed was changed, and he was put into a fresh warm bed, but was quite insensible, and could not speak the whole night. He died about eleven o'clock in the morning. The verdict was "died through excessive drinking" – but he died happy, and he died in a bed!

The conversation turned to other instances of excess drunkenness in Cambridge; "I saw one woman in Petty Cury – I suspect she was in her mid 30's, though she looked much older. She had one child on her back and one in her arms, a boy by her side and – she told me – a girl ill at the lodging house, and had no shoes. She said her husband had left her and she was making her way to her parish for relief – I gave her threepence to help her on her way.

And despite his acquaintance with the dregs of society attracted to Cambridge Pickwick could not but agree that he would probably have done the same thing.

"But there's no need for a countryman to starve – not with the country like it is today", joined in a somewhat rough looking chap. "They should do what Will and I used to do – make money out of rats! We'd walk miles with our ferrets and dogs round the farms. A lot of the farmer's overseers or bailiffs regarded rat catching as a good days sport for themselves, or the farmer would keep it for when there was nothing else for his men to do. But we did enough to get by and pay our way at any convenient inn at the end of the day – though being healthy young men we often slept rough in the farmer's hay so saving a few additional shillings.

"Rat catching is not the most pleasant of tasks, even when it is carried on for a living. Will and I had four ferocious little ferrets, two mongrel dogs, Bill and Ben & we were a good team of hunters.

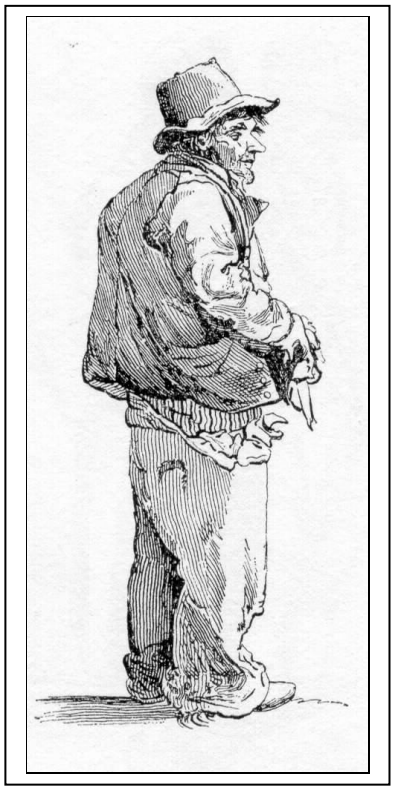
"Once we'd struck a bargain with the farmer or his man we went to work on the various rat-infested places. These could be anywhere around the farmyard, under wheat stacks, stables, in the fields or barns. I reckon that in those days vermin lived better than many country families. We'd put the ferrets into the most used holes or runs, then there'd be a delay of a few minutes before you'd hear an awful squealing arose from below the ground. Bill and Ben would wait for the hoards of frightened rats to scurry from the warrens. 'Here they come,' we'd yell, and sure enough the rats would pour from the holes as if the devil were on their tails. Them dogs would go to work as efficient four legged executioners, while Will and me armed with stout sticks whacked about as the rodents ran in all directions.

Often it would seem that when the hunt began it was over with both of us going round cutting off the rats' tails to show the farmer the job had been well and truly done. On a large farm the toll of these vermin with numerous barns and haystacks could reach several thousands in a few days, and very occasionally we'd be ere lucky enough to find a generous farmer willing to allow us to trap a few rabbits on a fifty- fifty basis. A good day rabbiting could yield a fair day's pay and a botsy or two for the dog but it's not an easy life

Rabbit catching was not always easy, and visions of the happy-go-lucky poacher as imagined by those town folk who have never been trapping were sadly wide of the actual facts, at least as related in the Castle Inn by a rough-looking chap in the corner with a Norfolk accent.

“Rabbiting normally takes place in the middle of winter with the bitterly cold north winds blowing across the wide hard frost impregnated ground. This is a game for only us hardiest of men. If we’re lucky the day's bag will well reward our patience; if not we pray for better results the next day, or the day after that. Normally we muzzle the ferrets before putting them into the warren; making sure the known holes are covered with nets. Even so there's often a bolthole missed somewhere. Rabbits have a fair sense of smell and once the odour of a ferret has been detected they will make for the exits with all speed.

“With the botsies in the bag it's just a matter of waiting for the ferocious little animals to come to the surface; but even this is not always easy as a ferret that has somehow come across a frightened rabbit will not move for hours and we have little option but to leave it and come back later m the hopes of finding the creature. This is particularly true in cold weather when the rabbits are loath to leave their warm warrens. Then it's often the matter of having to dig the animals out even if it takes up additional work. Nothing is ever easy.



“Many a time I go trangling in the fields at night or as the dawn comes up. Two of us go out with a couple of poles, what we call 'trammels', about 15 feet long with a net of half-inch mesh strung between. The net's 20 foot or more long and 14 to 15 feet wide, which we pull tight and carry a few inches above the ground when we get to a likely spot. We'll be after birds such as skylarks which we can sell to London dealers as delicacies, but we take any ground nesting bird or species that is around. Every two or three yards we touch the net on the ground and disturb the birds - we have to move fast and strike the moment the birds show and try to fly off, dropping the net over them. We separate the birds from the net, breaking their necks as we do so, and then move on to the next drop.
One old chap developed his own way of clearing the nets - he used not only his fingers but also his teeth in the kill. On one occasion his teeth gripped not a bird but a rat - he soon let that go!

“But now this kind of work has become more dangerous owing to the laws brought in by parliament to protect the landowners and what they consider are their legitimate sporting rights. These days almost every wild creature that flies or runs on four legs is considered by the gentry to be their legal property. Snaring of game, unlawful coursing & taking fish from the streams and ponds owned by this and that sporting society, means almost every stream and pond in the county is out of bounds.

“Farmers have started to employ gamekeepers, setting up mantraps, guns in woods - all sorts of snares to catch poachers. And they've brought in the heaviest of fines that make criminals out of honest men, whose only interest in life is to work and earn a sufficiency for themselves and their families. If they're caught the lads are fined, or flogged or imprisoned - then what happens to our families, so we have no alternative but to fight to get away if spotted”

At this another voice broke into the conversation “You wouldn't know Wood Hall, Hilgay by any chance? Only a group of Mr Jones's gamekeepers went out one night but four of them

got separated and were attacked by about ten poachers with bludgeons or the butt-ends of guns, several of which were broken in the affray. One poor old chap - William Case - was battered so bad he had to be carried in a litter to the hall where he died. He's left a widow and two children to mourn their loss - and a lot of us followed his coffin to the grave in the churchyard. John Long, one of the Downham Market constables, went out with a couple of other chaps and rounded up three of the desperadoes and with the help of the Hilgay constable apprehended another one at his house at Tottenhill, near Lynn, but there's one or two others they're still looking for.

All eyes turned back on their earlier speaker - but found only an empty chair, and a half-filled mug of beer.

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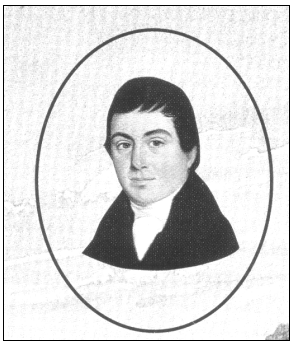

The sudden disappearance of the Norfolk stranger stunned the assembled company at the Castle Inn – but did not surprise the man who had quizzed him about the Hilgay murder. He was about fifty years old, Pickwick estimated, a plain country farmer who was obvious prosperous enough to make a pleasure trip to Cambridge. But he was conscientious enough not to let his pleasure distract him from his duty and John Peck – for so he introduced himself –was constable of the fenland parish of Parson Drove, near Wisbech.

Being conscientious he was not prepared to allow the suspect to escape – but where in Cambridge could one find a constable at that time of night? Pickwick knew – for had he not already discovered that Robert Flynn, constable number six, was more than likely to be in the back room of the Bird Bolt Inn, just down the road. And so it proved. But there was a problem. Robert Flynn dare not set out in pursuit of a villain by night on his own & John Peck would not allow of any delay – it was agreed to combine forces, and Pickwick decided to follow along.

Their route took them inevitably across Parker's Piece towards that part of Cambridge known as Barnwell – Flynn was convinced their man would be staying in one of the common lodging houses in that locality. It was an area that Pickwick had already visited, where he had enjoyed convivial company at "The Wellington". But if Barnwell by day was pleasant, Barnwell by night was frightful – an area of underground cellars, dark grey walls, wet rotten floors, cheerless fires, ragged urchins, squalid parents, straw beds, drunkenness & blasphemy all of which became etched on Pickwick's mind in the next few hours & committed to his notes

Flynn first led his party to Staffordshire Place, East Road. "The street is filthy, there is little light & with little ceremony we enter a house kept by William Donnex. Inside everything seems clean, the rooms are swept and garnished and the only creatures to be seen are the tenants and their tame goat. The 'master and missus' are civil, the goat less so, but there is no difficulty and with a courteous 'good night' we leave"

They turned up a dark and dingy yard to the house of Stephen Cowell. "In the kitchen a cheerful fire flickers – for the evening has turned cool; around it are gathered nine men, women and children; they are all exceedingly civil and exceedingly comfortable, having little on their minds, apparently, and less in their hands. The mistress opens the door which communicates to the right and left, shows us there is no one in bed and we leave the seemingly happy but grotesque family".

On they plodded though the dirt and dark to the corner of New Street and Robinson's "Victoria Lodging House" – obviously named in an attempt to express patriotism, or seek to raise the status of his home above others. "Down we descend a flight of steps which, by the glare of the light piercing through some shattered windows, seems to open into a sort of courtlet. On opening a door then thousand odours assail our nostrils. A group of fine robust women sit in great ease around the kitchen fire; two men on the right are busily engaged. Suddenly our ear is arrested by a shrill sound - Flynn says it's a pass-word given to others in the next room. There two men are making cabbage-nets: we ask them what they're 'up to' and they reply 'knitting nets, your honour: anything to keep us out of mischief'. We pass into the next room - almost suffocated in the attempt - and leave the women with their short 'bacco pipes' to disport themselves over a splendid supper, which they are preparing. In this inside room we see four men – two apparently 'men of the world', vicious-looking fellows: they are playing 'blind all-fours'. Two females grace the room, one of whom is a widow. Anger rests on the countenance of one, and ferocity on the brow of another. Having taken in this brief survey, we turn on our heel to go out, when the young ladies says 'Come, gentlemen, ain't ye going to stand a gallon o'heavy wet?' and, amid the coarse laughter of the gamblers and their friends, we leave the putrid arena, without complying

THE BIRD IN HAND INN.

"On a little way was Mr Gilbert Foster's; he had no lodgers except 'artizans' who had gone to bed – but were woken anyway. A red-haired young man, known to Flynn, asked them to have three-halfpennyworth of gin, which they declined. In Walton's, East Road, they found nothing worthy of particular report and poor Mrs Hard on Newmarket Road had no lodgers at all. At Thurlbourne's – 'Curly Dicks' – they were besieged with a host of cats and dogs, frizzing and snarling in all directions; while a little further on they arrived at Mr James Mullen's: "we open the door and are knocked backwards with the offensive carbon. Yet a blooming girl and a lusty child sit happily by the side of the fire; the mother washes at the tray, and the drunken landlord is 'tween sheets – all very happy in their respective situation!"

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John Peck, the Parson Drove farmer was by now somewhat shaken at the conditions he was discovering in the Barnwell lodging houses – he had experienced hardship in the fens but men must be desperate indeed to give up the open skies for these dingy back streets. Nevertheless he continued to accompany Pickwick and Constable Flynn as they explored deeper into the alleys

A few steps brought them to the Britannia Yard, which Pickwick noted was "a place as dark as dark can be; a place where the roving bandit might almost fancy he can find secure repose. Dark locality, dark entrance, dark passage, dark stairs, bring you to a kind of underground cellar, where a splendid fire illuminates and cheers all around. This is the celebrated abode of "Yorkshire Betty", a fair damsel of 58 summers who had recently married - another woman's husband! She is the essence of politeness; she tells us that she has only sixteen lodgers in tonight – things are dull with her at the moment. Two of her gentlemen went to Newmarket this morning, two to Huntingdon, two to St Ives, and so forth, to earn their bread in an honest

manner, ‘of course’, & when they have succeeded in their enterprise back they’ll come to this focus of honesty, this rendezvous of the ‘working classes’.”

But despite her assurances the Constable insisted on making a search. The room was crowded with sturdy-looking men and women, and healthy, vigorous children, smoking, yawning, laughing, playing, cooking – frying boiling, toasting – herrings, onions, fish, flesh and so forth; but, to their honour, not drinking! In the same basement, but at right-angles, was the beer-cellar too, the landlady praising its qualities, and adoring her former husband’s ‘brandy glass’ which she held very dearly and venerated very sincerely.

By now the effluvia coming from the various ‘dishes’ for supper had made the searchers qualmish, Peck turning a particularly pale colour was persuaded to take a ‘drop o’ Betty’s beer’ to ‘keep off the white feather’. With their tankards they re-entered the kitchen, and had a diverting narration from a tall, powerful, lusty fellow, who told them how he had done battle like a Briton among the French, but ‘he can’t say to a few’ just how many he had bayoneted. Then leaving this motley crew, they walked up stairs, to see Betty’s apartments. In one room there were seven beds, the linen on which was clean and sound – all on bedsteads; and Betty told them, with a roguish laugh, that ‘only two sleep together, and the sexes never mingled in the sleeping apartments’.

The searchers regained the comparatively fresh outside air only to plunge into Esther Price’s domicile. Pickwick noted: “As you open the door ten thousand odours assail your nostrils. You fancy you can feel the carbon with your fingers and your nose and your lungs. We persevere, get a draught of oxygen from the street, and in we go into the midst of them. There are about 10 males and females, all ages, all sizes, all apparently happy, sitting around, in grotesque confusion, a blazing fire. Facing the doorway, with his back against a wall, sits a man about 40 with a great red face and a short pipe. Flynn greets him, and he says he is not only well ‘but happy and comfortable’. A young man, about 16 years of age, ornaments the middle of the room; he sits quite laissez faire, and puffs his smoke in our eyes. A blooming young woman, who guards the cookery ware by the fire, says he is a coward for he won’t enlist; he tells her that he has no intention of ‘being made a target for the French just yet’. This reply is followed up with laughter and applause; and with all the grace we have, we try and make our exit, while they proceed to serve up a many-coloured and many-flavoured supper.”

On they proceeded from dark door to door. At James Jessop’s there was nothing to remark; nor was there anything worthy of notice at Thomas Norton’s. But then they reached Richard Lithell’s premises on Newmarket Road, where the constable suspected he would find his felon. He led the group upstairs, through every room in the house; but everything was clean and decent, the rooms well ventilated, and comfort and order reigned supreme – especially given that the price per head was only threepence. The Norfolk poacher was not there - though many a strange-looking character was, sleeping soundly and snoring loudly.

Their search seemed to be in vain – but there was one more chance. Flynn led the way to New Street and the home of a half-bred gypsy who they found was lying sick in one of four beds crammed into a small lobby. He was quite unable – or perhaps unwilling to help.

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The searchers were descending the stairs of the New Street tenement, their quest apparently doomed to failure, when Constable Flynn was accosted by a very poor lady who greeted him thus.

"If you please, Mr Flynn, my husband and I have been out on the tramp for the last week and we returned home about two or three hours ago. We was going to have our supper when we heard you was a-coming to see the man in the next room" – the way that news like that could circulate through the dark streets never failed to amaze the constable. She continued: "so we waited thinking you'd be a bit tired and we think you will not think it a liberty if we were to ask you to come in and have a cup o'tea – and bring your friends"

They lived in one small, poorly furnished room, but there was a good fire and the table was covered with a rough but clean cloth on which a very substantial supper was all laid out and ready. There was a small leg of mutton which had been in pickle for 3-4 days, a hot round loaf of bread, plenty of good salt butter and a large dish of watercresses; a very fine cauliflower and a dumpling - solid, fortifying and stuffed with currants – completed the feast. The man cut two very substantial pieces of mutton; next he cut the cauliflower in quarter and rolled one of the sections on to a plate, then came a lump of the dumpling which, together with a large piece of bread saturated with butter, was passed to the constable. The process was repeated for both Pickwick and Peck.

Pickwick knew that true politeness in such company demanded that he pile his plate with everything on the table - but he was not hungry, having eaten shortly before. He tried to engage them in conversation but they noticed he had scarcely touched the meat. "You're not eating your share sir - don't fear the mutton for its real good, we got it from a gentleman near Newmarket and thinking it wouldn't keep we put it in salt - we often do that when we're on the tramp".

Then they piled watercress on his plate: "they be right good sir, these creases - we picked them ourselves and they've been well washed and passed through three waters. May be you think we lives always like this but it isn't often we get the chance. We have been for two days and more without having a bit of victuals and we came in luck's way by getting a good job yesterday so we tries to make up for the bad days by having a blow-out like this once in a way like; if the poor people don't now and then have a little treat like this they'd die right out sir, that they would ... you're not eating your share ..." But he couldn't - he'd already dined. They were disappointed but they compromised as he took tea - black as ink - some bread, butter and watercresses.

Meanwhile Flynn was doing justice to the meal set before him, and even farmer Peck from Parson Drove was making a manful attempt to clear his plate. Then it was time to sit at ease and tell tales and almost inevitably the topic got around to the supernatural. Their host had been brought up in this Barnwell area, and the most haunted house in the world was just along the road – the old Barnwell Abbey House, former home to Squire Butler. Pickwick recalled the tales he had previously been told about that larger-than–life character and his coffin, but although there had been hints about ghostly doings, he had not been told the details. Nor was that to change, for the tale he now heard did not relate to Cambridge at all, but to a house at Histon, and it was told by their host's wife who as a girl had been in service there.

"It was Mr Goodlad from Girton that arranged for me to become a scullery-maid in an old house, tucked away in the heart of the village - a place they say was built in the 1480s. It seemed spooky, what with long corridors with floorboards that creaked, and doors that creaked, and walls that creaked, and the constant patter of tiny feet – hundreds of mice. To keep the mice down they had a cat and I soon made a friend of it. It used to come and purr around me when I was up early in the morning, only sometimes it would act strange and I'd wonder why. Then I found out – one morning I caught half a glimpse of another cat – and I knew two cats never got on in one house. Only then I realised I

hadn't caught half a glimpse at all – I'd seen all there was to see of that other animal – it was only half there! Next night a little girl dressed all in white and with a pale complexion appeared near the door to the room I shared – only when I spoke to her she disappeared into the wall. I thought I was seeing things – but then two of the other girls told me they'd seen her too and that every room was haunted, apart from one, and even there you felt people looking over your shoulder.

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Pickwick felt a chill run down his spine as Ann Waters continued her tale of her servant days at Histon – but it was only a sudden draft of cold air as the outside door was opened and closed with a bang

The girls knew what they had each seen, but knew that it couldn't really be there – surely ghosts didn't exist - at least not until the mistress of the house accused them of bringing one of their friends in without seeking her permission – a strange, very pale girl that had been there one moment and quite gone the next.

"So we started to keep a journal of what we saw, and it soon became full up. Once we heard the voice of some person singing Elizabethan airs to the music of a lute that echoed through the silent corridors. Often we'd find doors locked that we knew had been opened, cutlery that had been laid for dinner would be moved – the knife and fork switched round, papers would vanish from a drawer. Several times there'd be a knock on the door – but never nobody there.

"Then we'd see people who weren't there. One was a priest dressed in a black gown, carrying a book under his arm – he'd be accompanied by the smell of incense. There were stories of an underground passage that lead to Impington Hall, but I never found the way. What I did discover when I was polishing the stairs was that you could lift up one of the steps and beneath it there was a hollowed-out chamber, just big enough for a man to hide in. I was told it was a priest's hole, but to me it was somewhere to sweep the dust to save time. But there was a Puritan, too, with a tall hat and solemn air – miserable old chap he was, we'd know when he was about because we'd smell that stink you get from a sweaty old man. We used to wonder sometimes what would happen if the two of them met on the stairs and who would give way to who – though I suppose they would have just walked through each other.

"But I'm sure that two of the other ghosts did have a fight. There was a cavalier who would appear sitting in a chair near the front door – he was a most handsome man, with a sympathetic smile who always seemed sorry that he'd startled me. He was much nicer than the Roundhead – he had a perfectly horrible expression, I didn't like him at all. One night when the house was all asleep there came the sounds of a violent conflict, swords were clashing and there was a terrible shindy – but come morning there was nothing to be seen, and no sign of the battle."

Ann could only speculate – but there was no doubt it had been something like that that had cost her her job. "One morning there was the almighty crash of breakfast dishes and cups in the kitchen. The mistress and her daughter rushed in but found nobody there – and not a sign of broken china. Only it was my misfortune to come in a moment afterwards, and they accused me of being careless and clearing away the broken crockery. I tried to tell them about the ghosts, but they would not believe me, and none of the other girls would back me up for fear of losing their position. They turned me out without a character and I was wandering all alone and wondering what I would do when I met David, here, and we've been together ever since"

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Further discussions of things that went bump in the night were interrupted by a thump in the night as Constable Flynn suddenly hurled himself across the room of the tenement in New Street and out of the door. Pickwick and Peck followed to find him struggling with a fellow they both recognised as the man who had regaled them with his tales at the Castle, the Norfolk poacher they had been seeking.

But the struggle was not going in Flynn's favour. Driven by desperation his potential captive was fighting with gusto, with teeth and nails snapping and gouging like some cornered animal. Already the constable was bleeding from a nasty cut above his eye and his mobility – already compromised by the size of the meal he had just consumed – was further reduced as another thunderous kick thudded into his leg.

As Flynn sank to the ground following a particularly vicious blow to his over-full stomach farmer Peck from Parson Drove took a hand. He stripped off his coat, rolled up his sleeves and waded into the fray. This was a man who knew how to fight; not for him the niceties of civilised combat, Peck was a battler in the best Fen-tiger tradition, nothing was barred, anything went.

Pickwick's impression of the battle that followed was somewhat indistinct. His view of the affray was restricted in part by the darkness of the passageway as the combat spread outside the house and into the yard, and part by the fact that his own hands were covering his face and he was peeping out between his fingers. He was aware of a mighty amount of grunting and growling, of slaps and thuds, of the sound of running feet as the alley suddenly filled with onlookers whose cheers and jeers - but directed at whom he was unable to decide – echoed through the area. But he was aware that as the battle raged so Peck was getting the worst of it, he was being brutally beaten to a pulp and Flynn was still writhing in agony on the floor.

It was then that Pickwick acted. Bending over the constable he reached for the truncheon emblazoned with the royal crest, the symbol of ultimate authority, which required all concerned to have respect for the laws of country and king – although now it was Queen. And holding it high above his head Pickwick ventured into the alleyway where the poacher was now sitting astride the farmer, his hands grasped tightly around Peck's throat. "I command you to desist in the name of the Queen" Pickwick cried in as manful a voice as he could muster.

The poacher looked around, alarmed that he should be so challenged, but then noticed the portly Pickwick, his legs trembling and his whole frame shaking – and not with cold. "You know just what you can do with your Queen" the man snarled, turning from the prostrate Peck towards him.

It was then that the Norfolk poacher found for the first time in his life that he had something in common with his new young monarch. Victoria had been crowned, just weeks ago, now it was his turn. Pickwick raised the truncheon high into the air and brought it down with all his considerable weigh upon the villain's head. The wooden baton split with the impact, the painted lion and unicorn sprang apart by quite a quarter-inch. But they had done their duty. The poacher was prostrate on the ground and the angry crowd who had been baying for blood melted away into the darkness, away from the spectre of that bald-headed elderly gentleman whose courage and fighting prowess would become a tale told time and again in the Barnwell taverns, one to impress even those habitués of the Wellington itself.

Ann Waters and her husband dragged the two prostrate protagonists into their home, the floor of their small room becoming smeared with blood from various wounds yet somewhat cleaner than normal as the bodies swept away the dust that covered it. They bound the poacher hand and foot, using rags as ropes and wedged him under the table. Then with that danger past they turned their attention to the constable and the farmer.

Flynn was pale apart from the ugly bruises already forming around his eyes and the redness of numerous scratches. But he was a tough character and was soon groaning as he regained consciousness, his colour returning as brandy – kept solely for medicinal purposes Ann Waters stressed – was forced down his throat. But Peck was worse; his shirt had been ripped open in the fight revealing his weather-beaten fenland torso – and Peck's body was not tanned brown, it was not even white – it was bright blue!

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If ever Pickwick felt panic it was now. There in the squalid New Street tenement in the dingy Barnwell back streets he was leaning over the prostrate body of John Peck, a body that was patriotic – red with blood from numerous cuts and grazes, white as death beneath its tan, and bright blue everywhere not normally visible to the eye.

Ann Waters and her husband were equally perplexed, never in all their travelling had they encountered anything like it while Constable Flynn downed a little more of the brandy store and then began to chant:

"Molly of the Woad, and I fell out,
O what do think it was all about?
For she had money and I had none,
And that is how the strife begun"

He then roared with laughter at the surprised look on their faces. For he knew what it was – did they not know their history, did they not remember how in the olden days the ancient Britons had painted themselves bright blue to frighten the Roman invaders – and the dye that they used had been made from a herb called woad.

The ancient practice had died out in the civilised world centuries ago but there was still a primitive breed of people from deep in the fens who would paint themselves if ever they had to venture into unfamiliar territory. And did not farmer Peck come from the very centre of that land, Parson Drove, near Wisbech.

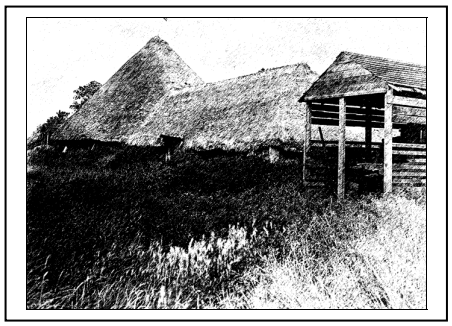
Even as Flynn spoke the words so John Peck stirred and with a groan raised himself to a sitting position. "Yes but it never scared yon matey from Hilgay, did it" – indicating the trussed figure beneath the table, "p'raps I should have used a brighter shade of blue"

Woad had once been regarded as a wild flower but was now by no means common in most parts of the country. But out at Parson Drove some 70 or 80 acres were still planted yearly, as Peck told them.

"It's not an easy crop to cultivate; first the land has to carry a crop of cole-seed, sown after the fallow season and well-fertilised with ten loads of farmyard manure. This crop is eaten off by sheep and then even more manure has to be spread before the woad is drilled in three sessions, the first in April, the second two weeks later and the third at the end of May.

"The plant grows about two feet in height and has leaves like arrowheads and small yellow flowers that give way to pendulous seedpods. But the crop can't be left to look after itself and much attention has to be paid to weeding by both men and women. The men wear leather knee-caps and the women stiff aprons, working along the rows on their knees and chopping down the vegetation with their wad spuds – a little spade with a handle fashioned to fit into the palm of their hands. We still call woad by the old name of 'wad'", Peck explained. "Ordinarily the farm labourers can do most of the work but the cropping season is the busiest

of the year and when they get to the slow operation of chipping off the blue-green leaves into baskets the woad mill finds work for twelve hands.



"The wad cart – a large tumbril - draws the leaves to the wad mill where it backs into an opening in the turf wall and the contents are tipped into a large pit, about 28 feet round. Inside this are three enormous wooden mills fastened to a pivot in the centre of the pit and these are set in motion by three horses harnessed on the outside. One load's leaves needs ninety minutes crushing, grinding up and pulping after which they're taken to a gloomy little shed called the 'balling' house where women and men work the pulp up into large balls. Then these are carted away to dry in an open, slate-roofed building where they stay till Christmas. After that the leaves are taken back to the mill, this time to be ground into powder and by now you can only tell it was ever a vegetable by its smell. It completes its process in the "couch" barn where it is watered and allowed to ferment for several weeks before being weighed up, jammed into tubs and despatched to the cloth manufacturers in Yorkshire. But they now prefer to use indigo so our farmers are looking to find other markets.

"We'd heard something about the pale blue ribbons the Cambridge undergraduates have started wearing when they race against Oxford on the river and thought how there might be a demand down here for a brighter blue dye – rower's woad if you like", he chuckled.

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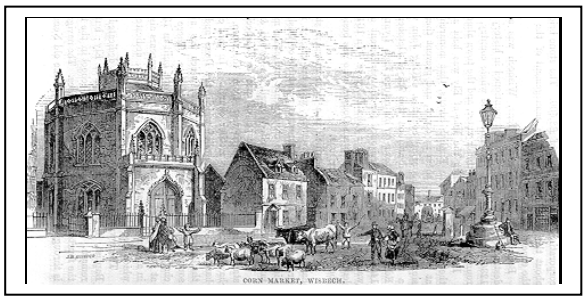
Though the ancient crop of woad might still be found in the area around Parson Drove farmer Peck himself did not grow it on his own land. He ran his farm at Inham Hall on a shoestring, relying on a small long-term workforce of between six and eight men, augmented when needed by casual labour.

There was always work to be done, filling in dikes or setting new hedges and trees – and emptying the Hall privies. For their contents, like the dung from the horse and cattle yards could add fertility to the soil – and it brought 'Happy Jack', the privy emptier, three shillings extra in his pay.

At the annual Statute hiring fairs at Wisbech or Holbeach he tended to re-hire people he knew he could trust. Men like old Bawler or shepherd Savage who had been with him for years, and who could turn their hand to horses or cut reed for thatching as well as pulling their weight in the harvest fields. That was the crucial period – indeed he would need to be returning home very shortly to make preparations, trying if possible to bring in local men and women to supplement his own workers at this most important time of the year. In the past he had tried using the itinerant Irish labourers who tramped the countryside looking for employment, but these were unreliable. They would promise to turn up but then turn out for somebody else. And employing Irishmen could alienate the fenland labourers - he'd heard a drunken fenman at Wisbech market say he 'wished all farmers who employed Irishmen might have their corn burnt growing on the land'.



Experience had also taught him that it could be false economy to pay too little wages – the poor workers had difficulties enough without farmers squeezing every penny from their pay. Nor would he let them work if the weather were not right – stopping over-eager harvesters

from reaping damp grain by giving them beer would increase the value of his crop, but too much beer had its disadvantages and could lead to sloppy work and stroppy workmen

The last decade been amongst the worst he'd experienced, years of agricultural unrest, destruction of machinery and rick burning. Like others in the rest of the county he had been made too painfully aware of the power of the arsonist. He had seen and heard how his near-neighbours had been attacked, despite calls for calm from those who championed the working classes like John Drakard who'd exhorted them: "Pause before participating in fatal work of destruction. The farmers are not your foes – how many can refrain from daily labour themselves? Call upon the new government to reduce the tithes. Pray, enforce, demand Reform!"

But he was caught in the trap of rising rents and wages and falling prices for his crops, though, thank God the last year or two had been a little better. He no longer feared quite so much his weekly visit to the Wisbech Corn Exchange. He had agonised but finally bought a threshing machine, though it had taken all the profit from the sale of 11 pigs to do it. It worked well, but still required up to 35 workers to operate it. And if it went wrong he would have to reply on the Parson Drove blacksmiths to put things right again. They were vital to the parish's wellbeing, with so much work being done by horsepower. But there was no doubt machines were the future – he'd read an article some years ago that said there were 10,000 steam engines at work. These machines did the work of 200,000 horses – and that number of horses would need more than a million acres to keep them fed and grazed.

But if horses were the farmers' friends nature provided many other enemies. Slugs were a constant pest, especially in mild and wet weather when he'd pay women to spread coleseed leaves on the growing wheat to take the slugs off. This was not a job they relished, for shaking the black slimy creatures off the leaves into pails of water gave even the most hardened women the shivers. It was part of their lot, as was control of 'the terrify' – the local name for the weeds, lousewort, treacle mustard and goosegrass whose tangled stems and sticky seeds had to be cleaned out of the cornfields by hand. Birds too were a pest and this year in particular vast flocks of sparrows were reeking destruction and there was to be a parish meeting to consider paying fourpence a dozen for the bodies of old sparrows.

All these were problems common around the country. "I always say", Peck added, "that when created beings are doomed to suffer torments on this poor earth, God makes them farmers". But what the fen farmer faced in addition was the constant worry of flooding.

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John Peck of Parson Drove was, Pickwick was discovering, an exceptional fenman indeed. He was about 50 years of age, tall and well-built, but now slightly over his prime of life – his eyesight was not what it had been, his teeth were in need of replacement and he now suffered more than a few twinges of rheumatism. He'd married a woman ten years his junior to whom he wrote daily when he was away from home – and what was he to confess to her about his latest adventure?

She would chide him for forgetting that he was a married man with responsibilities with seven sons and a daughter dependent on him – and doubtless remind him that he had promised to renounce violence ever since he shot his son Edward. "I didn't do in on purpose", Peck mused, "we'd been plagued with an outbreak of highway robberies about 1812 and I'd bought a pair of pocket pistols to carry with me. Years later we had some friends round and got talking about how times had become more violent, so I took out these guns – and one of them went off. I'd forgotten to unload it. It hit my son Edward in the face and the bullet lodged against his jawbone. Fortunately Dr Danford was there and he managed to extract the bullet and stop the bleeding, but it's left the lad deaf in one ear – and me permanently nagged".

Perhaps it was to atone for his near-fatal error that Peck threw himself into public works, becoming parish constable, surveyor of highways, commissioner of income tax, distributor of militia papers – and served on two drainage boards. To many people the story of fen drainage was as dull as the water in the ditches involved, but Peck was a fund of fascinating facts and tales about the characters involved.

"Once you get a few miles north of Cambridge you're into the fen area, a low-lying marshy swamp with sluggish rivers meandering through it and the odd island of higher ground on which people live. Some of the islands are big – like the island of Ely or Chatteris, others are small, perhaps just large enough for a man to build a house on. It was like that for hundreds of years and the people living there got used to it - well it was half-dry half the year, half wet the other half. They could find their way across the marsh, they could catch the eels, shoot the birds, harvest the reeds and rushes – that sort of thing.

"Being such a wilderness people felt safe out there. Even the Roman armies found it a hard place to tame, though after Boadiccea led her uprising they made a determined effort to assert their authority and launched an attack on the Iceni stronghold at Stonea to squash them once and for all. They built a new town, they build roads – but they've all disappeared into the fen. They even tried their hand at digging new rivers and drains to try and get the water out to sea more quickly – so it wouldn't overflow the land – but again without much success.

"Then when the monks had founded their monasteries and priories some of them had a go at drainage and they had the organisation to get things done; Bishop Morton even dug a new river. But then Henry VIII did away with them. After the defeat of the Armada, Queen Elizabeth's courtiers had plans for a scheme to drain the marshes all over the country. They reckoned they could create a storehouse for the whole Realm with enough left over to export and that thousands of people would benefit. The main problem was cost, nobody could afford it, so they proposed that if somebody took on the drainage then people who benefited from it would have to give the drainers part of their lands in payment

"Well something had to be done, life in the fens had got worse due to flooding from both land and sea - those of 1607 and 1613 were particularly bad. One chap wrote how he saw at Lt Downham one man drove 400 cattle to pasture with the help of only one small boy – and the only way they could get around was on stilts.

When King James I came to the throne in 1603 he showed a lively interest in drainage – well he held estates in the region. Now the people who looked after their individual areas & knew how things should be done were the Commissioners of Sewers so the King asked them for the names of those willing to give up part of their lands to those who would drain them. Not that anybody wanted the King interfering in their backyards. He got various surveys made and asked people to come forward with ideas – and that's when the problems really started, soon even the fishes were up in arms!

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Farmer Peck was warming to his tale of the fenland drainage of the 1600s.

King James I might have wanted the watery wastes to be tamed, the fenmen did not. First William Atkins was sent to take a survey of the fenland with his eleven-foot auger – and that caused a lot of rude comments from the fenmen - then a group of brave knights and their squires ventured out – but only in the dry weather – sounding the sewer channels with long poles, and finding the Great Ouse itself had less than two foot of water in it in some places.

They said there was hardly enough water for the fishes to swim in, and a lot of new drains should be dug and the rivers deepened – so the fishes responded. One of them – a powte – wrote a poem setting forth their views.

Now this was too ridiculous – how could a fish write a poem, and even if they did how could new rivers affect them. Peck explained that the little fishes were concerned that drainers proposals, "to sow both peas and oats, where no man ever thought it – where men did row in boats e're undertakers bought it" would see the fish wiped out. As they said in their verse

Behold this great design,
Which they do now determine,
Will make our bodies pine
A pray for crows and vermin.
For they do mean all fens to drain,
And waters overmaster,
And they will make of bog and lake
For Essex cows a pasture

So now it was not just a battle of man against man, it was fish against cattle; the wildfowl would not be so badly affected:

The fen-bred fowls have wings
To fly to other nations;
But we have no such things
To help our transportations.
We must give place, a grievous case!
To horned beasts and cattle;
Unless that we can all agree
To drive them forth with battle.

So the fish set about mobilising their allies; they called on good old Captain Flood to lead them forth to battle:

This noble captain yet
Was never known to fail us,
But did the conquest get
Of all that did assail us.
His furious rage none could assuage.
But, to the world's great wonder,
He drives down banks, and breaks their ranks,
And hurleth all asunder.

They alerted the God of the sea, Neptune himself:

This work must needs provoke thee;
They mean thee to disease,
And with fen waters choke thee.
But with thy mace thou can'st deface
And quite confound their matter,

And send the sand, to make firm land,
When they do want fresh water.

And they called on the assistance of the celestial bodies themselves:

And last we pray the moon
That she will be propitious,
As see that nought be done
To prosper the malicious.

And many a deed would be done in the years to come when the moon lit her light behind a cloud. But the fish were master tacticians; first they required

That summer's heat make cause a fret – just a little gentle wave
Whereby themselves they flatter – the drainers would be lulled into a sense of false security; and just when they thought they'd tame nature, it was then nature would hit back:
Yet be so good as send a flood,
Lest Essex calves want water

But the strange thing it that it was the testimony of a cow that helped frustrate the drainage schemes of one of the most powerful men in the area.

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Peck continued with his version of the story of the fens. King James I wanted the fens drained; one man was prepared to undertake it. Myles Sandys, son of the Archbishop of York, was a wealthy landowner who had his seat at Wilburton. Myles had made his fortune through various dubious court cases during Elizabeth's reign and was an example of the new progressive spirit of the age – so James knighted him.

Now he came up with a scheme for bypassing the Old West River – which he said was causing a blockage to the water coming from Huntingdon. All it would need was one river to the north of it, and another to the south – and what's more Sir Myles would see the job through. All he asked was what parliament had already agreed – that he could keep some of the newly drained and fertile land for himself. Of course this was just what the King wanted to hear – here was one man being positive when so many were opposing the idea, one man who would put the public good before his private purse.

But then when he was hunting in the area King James got a message from some of his trusted courtiers. They told him to go to a stable, where he would hear a cow speak. So, intrigued, the King did as was suggested. And in the stable he found a cow, completely wrapped up in cloth, apart from its horn. On the horn was a parchment – and that parchment damned Sir Myles. For the scheme he was proposing would benefit nobody but himself, at the expense of many of the fen folk around. Not only that he would have had to employ witches to carry it through – because nobody else could have worked the magic that would be needed. But Sir Myles had also upset the University of Cambridge. They were convinced that his scheme would have dried up the River Cam to such an extent that the boats would not have enough water to float on, and if the barges could not get to Cambridge the University would die. All in all it would spark a full-scale riot.

The King condemned Sir Myles and his scheme as a base, cheating monopoly. And that was the end of it. Only it wasn't. Sir Myles got himself appointed on to the commissioners of sewers, the body responsible for maintaining and improving the fen drains.

Everybody was talking about draining; some said their lands were rarely flooded and any flood enriched the meadows, producing better crops next year. Others claimed supporters of drainage had told parliament that all the fens were a mere quagmire whereas in reality they afforded employment throughout the year to many thousand cottagers, gathering reeds, turves and many other fen commodities of great use both to town and country. Londoners love the good life; they appreciated such delicacies as fenland ducks – did they not realise that draining the fens would mean an end of the fenland ducks so that none would be had but at excessive prices? The Drainers countered saying that tame sheep were better than wild duck, a good fat ox more filling than well-grown eel.

Others said simply that it was impossible - many had burnt their fingers in these waters and instead of draining the fens only emptied their own purses. It would certainly be expensive – but there were Adventurers who would adventure their capital and Undertakers willing to undertake the work.

Nobody could agree whether big new rivers were needed, or whether the old ditches just needed cleaning out. So in 1616 they called a meeting of all the experts at Wisbech to sort it out, once and for all. After great debate they recommended diking and cleaning - maintaining old channels not making new ones – and that was not what Sir Myles wanted to hear.

But that didn't stop him. A couple of years later it was agreed to dig new drains around Willingham & Cottenham and Haddenham and Wilburton fens – right in Myles' back yard. There was a protest meeting at Haddenham church one Sunday after the morning service. One man harangued the congregation from the pulpit – and the whole parish, apart from two, decided to oppose the scheme. They organised a collection and raised £10 to cover the expenses of fighting the case at the next commission of sewers. And just to make sure they had full backing of local people they arranged a demonstration at Ely in June 1619 when about 2000 fenmen got together. That was a night to remember - they rang bells, banged drums, built bonfires and shot their muskets into the air for much of night. The sheriff and two justices of the Peace backed up the cause – though some said they were just courting popularity and gathering money by posing as the saviours of the commons and navigation. They urged Sir Myles not to proceed with the scheme, but Sir Myles took the matter to Star Chamber – he wasn't going to be deflected by such rabble.

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While the men of Haddenham were opposing Sir Myles Sandys' scheme for drainage there in 1619, at Littleport another Lord of the Manor was also coming forward with a plan to drain the fens. Once more the locals were convinced he was just trying to increase his own acreage but instead of verbal protests they turned to direct action, setting about his bailiff and causing such a disturbance that the Lord was forced to hire guards to protect his land. But even when the guards identified trouble-makers they daren't do anything about them. In the end the Lord got so deep in debt that he was forced to hand over the Manor to his creditors. Littleport people rejoiced – until they found out who acquired the land – Sir Myles!

Out at Sutton similar things were happening; in 1624 about 4000 acres of fenlands were enclosed by a group of rich men who secured the agreement of the Dean and Chapter of Ely Cathedral by granting them a share of the spoils. Once more Sir Myles had his hand in the proceedings and when the poorer inhabitants protested and petitioned parliament he had seven of them committed to the Bishop of Ely's gaol.

Many were adamant that the undrained fenland was a profitable place to be, poet Michael Drayton described the scene:

The toyling Fisher here is tewing of his net:

The Fowler is imployed his lymed twigs to set.
One underneath his Horse, to get a shoote doth stalke;
Another over Dykes upon his Stilts doth walke:
There others with their Spades, the Peats are squaring out,
And others from their Carres, are busily about
To draw out Sedge and Reed for Thatch and Stover fit.

If small-scale schemes were controversial the massive overall drainage plans were being opposed even by the powerful Bishops of Ely and Peterborough. But by now King James I had got fed up with the bickering. He decided that for the honour of his kingdom he would not suffer any longer the said land to be abandoned to the will of the water, nor to let it lye waste and unprofitable and declared he would undertake the work. He would not actually dig the ditches himself so a Dutch engineer, Cornelius Vermuyden, was invited to consider the practicalities. But James died 1625 & Vermuyden moved away to reclaim fens elsewhere.

The new King, Charles I, was happy to leave reclamation to his subjects and any Royal schemes were put on the back burner. He had other battles to fight – including a severe disagreement with his parliament – so he sacked them. He would rule alone.

But the problem of drainage would not go away and things were obviously not going to get better on their own. In 1630 they convened another great meeting of Commissioners of Sewers at Kings Lynn. This time they decided they had to grasp the nettle, though they had to placate the University by promising that whatever was done would never interfere with the navigation of boats up to Cambridge. They would get in an outside expert – how about the one King James had consulted? No said the fenmen – if these fens were going to be drained, they'd be drained by an Englishman – we don't want foreigners mucking about with them.

So they looked about and found one. And who better that the Earl of Bedford, from Woburn Abbey, who owned 20,000 acres of land near Thorney. He agreed to give it a go – but it was impossible to drain it completely so he'd plan to keep the fens free from water in summer time and secure from the worst of the winter floods. The meres, like Whittlesey and Ugg would also be excluded but he'd dig some new dykes and make roads and bridges – oh and take 95,000 acres for his trouble. He'd need a consortium to share the costs and effort – and amongst the first to come forward was – who else - Sir Myles Sandys of Wilburton. They would of course not do the work themselves, they needed a contractor. Who was the one James had wanted & the fenmen vetoed – oh yes, Vermuyden. He came up with a plan for new cuts and rivers - one named "Sandys" cut – and didn't that please Sir Myles, (though it was not finished for centuries!) But most of all there would be one new river, the "Bedford", to divert the water from Bedfordshire and Huntingdonshire away from the meandering Ouse at Earith, taking it 20 miles straight towards the sea instead of 30 miles crooked. You can't do it, bor, said the fenmen. You can't muck about with nature. Oh yes we can, said Cornelius and Sir Myles – just you wait and see!

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Peck from Parson Drove continued his tale of Sir Myles and the fenland drainers. He told how Vermuyden amassed an army of assistants and labourers to construct his mighty new Bedford River. It was hard, manual work in a hard, hostile area. Few of the fenmen wanted this invasion of their territory and although some of them undertook the work – it was that or starve – they did so reluctantly and worked as slowly as possible. And when the work that had been done during the day was filled in again overnight, well somehow none of them happened to see anything. Well might Sir Myles rant and rave, he could not be out there on guard and had he been may well have ended up as part of the filling in the dike. Beside the longer it took, the more wages had to be paid.

It took seven years of hard work before the new river from Earith to Salter's Lode was finished and another great session of sewers was convened, this one at St Ives in 1637. Once more the experts deliberated, finally concluding that the scheme was a success, the fens were now dry, at least in the summer months. Which was just as well for Sir Myles who was heard to say to one of his co-adventurers that it had proved far more costly than he had ever envisaged: "I could not pay £100 now if I had to go to prison. I have had to sell my lands to pay my debts". The fenmen rejoiced at his discomfiture, until they realised that if the Lords were poor the labourers would be worse. With money short the adventurers had to economise – and bottom of the pile for payment were the fenmen who had laboured for seven hard years in the fenland mud.

But at least the scheme was a success; the fenmen had said it would never work – 'You can't do it bor, you can't muck about with nature' – and they were about to be proved conclusively wrong. The time came when the first great flood was to be channelled down the new river. Sir Myles and his co-adventurers journeyed down from London, along the Aldreth Causeway and then on to Earith. It was the culmination of man's superiority over nature, the fens that had defeated the Romans and frustrated the Conqueror were to be tamed at last.

Their Lordships looked with pride at the long straight new channel that narrowed off into the horizon with its fine high banks. They watched as the dam that blocked its junction with the Great Ouse was removed, saw the water surge into their magnificent channel and rush directly to the sea. They saw the new banks take the strain … and to their horror they saw the new banks collapse. Water broke through and overflowed into the fen, land that had been half-wet in winter was soon completely flooded. And the fenmen said 'I told you - you can't muck about with nature'

Complaints and petitions showered on the Privy Council and the King turned against the Earl of Bedford and his adventurers. Another meeting of experts was called who concluded that perhaps they had been wrong last time – the fens had not been tamed after all. So the 1637 award was set aside and they declared that contract was unfulfilled as the land still remained subject to inundation especially in winter.

By now King Charles I was disgusted with the whole effort; like his father before him he would do the work himself – and this time he would do the job properly, the fens would be dry winter as well as summer. What's more he would built himself a fine new town in the middle of the noxious marshes – Charlemont, incorporating his own ideas on town planning, would arise at Manea. He would receive 57, 000 acres of fenland as his reward. But what about the land already granted to Bedford and his consortium. Their scheme had failed, surely they should return the land to those people from whom it had been taken. The rightness of the case was plain for all to see – but little land was handed back.

Of course, His Majesty the King, was not actually going to undertake the work himself. He would need a contractor, somebody with vision and a scheme, somebody who could do a good job. There were numerous Dutch drainers in the kingdom whose advice could be sought. But who was the one that King James had favoured, the one that the fenmen had rejected, the one that the Earl of Bedford had employed, the one who had failed so spectacularly – Cornelius Vermuyden. Yes he would do nicely; the King invited him to come up with another plan.

Meanwhile out at Ely a local landowner, Oliver Cromwell, had been appointed collector of Cathedral tithes. He knew that you couldn't stand in the way of progress and drainage would come, but he knew the fenmen had been badly treated. He undertook, for small payment, to oppose the drainers in court for five years and get better compensation. By 1638 some were calling him 'Lord of the Fens'

With King Charles I determined to drain the fens at full speed, and Oliver Cromwell determined to delay operations the scene seemed set for conflict. Vermuyden came up with some new theories; having analysed the situation he'd decided that the problem lay in the fact that the land was flat and criss-crossed by dozens of rivers which easily overflowed. The answer was obvious; it was to build river banks to keep the river water in. But that was not his way; for once he started building banks he would have to keep on and on. No, he had a better scheme than that … But by now few had any time for the Dutchman and his thoughts.

Sir Myles Sandys, failed drainer, was worried, fearing 'a general rebellion in all the fen towns'. The whole area was in turmoil. There were riots at Coveney & Littleport where labourers assembled for a game of football as an excuse for sabotage. At Wicken drainage works were attacked by "the meaner sort of people", but when given the opportunity to question an informant Sir Myles declined, claiming Wicken was in Cambridgeshire outside his jurisdiction, he was only bothered about the Isle of Ely.

But was the opposition just to drainage, or to the religious changes the King was trying to introduce, or something else. Who could be sure? Certainly there was trouble at Sutton that resulted in a number of prospective parliamentary fighting men being gaoled by Sir Myles, who just happened to be enclosing local land at the time – which was what the people were complaining about.

And then there was the personal problem that Sir Myles, of Wilburton, was having at next-door Stretham. The Sandys family had been granted the Manor by Queen Elizabeth & he'd been allowed to establish a market. But the locals did not appreciate it; they were worried of rumours of the plague seeping the Lincolnshire fens where fairs had been suspended in 1636. It was obviously nonsense, or was it – for Sir Myles' wife Elizabeth died in October that year and was buried at Stretham. The marriage had been productive, with seven sons being born. Grief-stricken Sir Myles married again, a widow woman, 25 years his junior. Now he wanted to built a family chapel on to the church

But the rector, Nicholas Felton was being obnoxious. He kept claiming that Sir Myles had inclosed open ground and stocked it with his sheep and cattle, and that he refused to pay tithes. He appealed to the King, begging that Myles be made to produce surveys showing ancient boundaries that he had previously refused to make available to him. But the King had other matters on his mind. He had converted to Catholicism and a new Bishop of Ely, Wren, was now seeking to beautify churches with candles. Felton followed the new dictates, railing in the communion table, making new steps to the altar and bowing twice as he went up and came back.

These religious changes infuriated puritans such as Oliver Cromwell, adding another dimension to the disputes of the time. With the outbreak of the Civil War England divided into factions, brother against brother. Cambridge University supported the King, Cambridge town and county backed parliament, as did Myles Sandys, despite being actively involved in fen drainage, which was something Oliver Cromwell and the fenmen opposed. Also fighting for parliament was a certain Colonel Vermuyden.

One casualty of the war was Parson Felton. He was accused of having supported the Royalist cause, "reading the King's declaration, and refusing to read the ordinance of Parliament, and left off praying for the same". He was also accused of persuading a parishioner not to join Cromwell's Regiment & soldiers were reported to have found arms and a barrel of gunpowder in his house. In addition it was said he got drunk, gambled & paid too much attention to his curate's wife. But many saw Sir Myles' hand in the allegations against one who had been such a trouble to him.

For Felton had continued to frustrate his powerful Lord. Once Sandys had erected his new chapel described as “exceeding handsome and elegant … very large, finely roofed and well carved”, the rector refused to consecrate it. So the petulant parson was ejected from his living and a new man instituted in his place. Two years later, in 1636, the church witnessed Sir Myles’ funeral in the new family chapel. But he was not to lie in state for very long. His estate passed to his son, another Sir Myles Sandys who, like his dad, married a woman called Elizabeth. And in other ways too it was to be a case of like father, like son.

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Farmer Peck from Parson Drove, near Wisbech, was reluctant to deal too much with the impact of the Civil War on his part of the fenland, though Pickwick managed to elucidate some account of a particularly brutal episode in that most troubled of times.

“Doctor Michael Hudson was a fighting parson of Woodcroft, near Peterborough. He was a chaplain to King Charles & raised a troop of yeomen to protect the district from the Puritans, beating them in more than one battle. Finally Cromwell sent a force which drove him into Woodcroft Castle and besieged him there. Then the Roundheads stormed the place and the battle raged throughout the house and up the stairs. One by one Hudson's yeomen were killed. The parson, driven to the roof, offered to surrender but Cromwell's men would have nothing of it. They thrust him over the battlements and tried to hurl him into the moat. But Parson Hudson clung desperately to the stonework, so they slashed off his fingers. The gallant parson dropped like a stone into the water; maimed and bleeding he struggled across the moat, clambered up the bank, and was stabbed to death by the pikes of the Parliamentarians. His ghost still haunts the area; at night I’ve heard the ring and clash of swords and high, pathetic cries of "Mercy! Have mercy on me!"

“Eventually after a disastrous battle at St Neots the remnants of the Royalist forces headed off towards the safety of the fenland. And then we get a mystery: some say how Mucky Porter from Southery made his name and fortune by guiding King Charles across the fen, resting at Wentworth and hiding in the thick Kings Hedges outside Cambridge. But others tell a different version that has Mucky and the King being chased across Southery and Littleport fens and bribing their way to safety by showing sentries an old split grey goose feather – for no true fenman could deny assistance to anybody with such a potent charm. I’m not sure which one, if either, I believe” Peck confessed. But even Mucky Porter could not save Kings Charles I who was beheaded in January 1649; Cromwell, Lord of the fens became Protector of the country.

But while the war raged there was time for the fenmen to undo even more of the work of the drainers, and when the bloody war was finally over the world had changed for ever. The King was dead, the Earl of Bedford was dead, hated Sir Myles Sandys was dead and with them died any plans for a major drainage of the fens. Into the void left by the King stepped Oliver Cromwell to become Protector of the country, protector of the fenmen against the iniquities of the drainers. But it was not to be. Cromwell the fenman’s friend became Cromwell the fenman’s enemy when another drainage act was introduced; a new, 5th, Earl of Bedford, with his original adventurers – including the late Sir Myles’ son, Sir Myles Sandys junior - would this time make the fens dry both summer and winter. They would take a wet wilderness and make it fit to grow corn and grain, cole seed and rape seed for the making of soap and oil, flax and hemp for weaving all sorts of linen cloth & good pasture for feeding and breeding cattle – it would be everything anybody would want.

They needed a contractor to do the work, and had several to choose from. One had tried and failed, was unpopular, disliked by his colleagues, and tainted by his associations with the King. So they gave him the job. Surely he could not get it wrong another time!

So this time Cornelius Vermuyden came up with a new scheme that divided the Great Level into three parts – North level, Middle and South. He started by repairing works of earlier drainers, constructing new banks and digging new channels including the Twenty Foot, the Forty Foot and the Sixteen Foot drains. By 1651 it was adjudged that the fens on the north-west side of the Bedford River had been drained as appointed.

He then turned to the South Level. He'd already dug a new Bedford River, now he said he needed a newer one; wider, deeper and alongside the first, with land between them that could be sacrificed when the floods came, high banks to keep the water in and new sluices. It was a monumental engineering exercise, and needed hundreds of men to dig. But this time he could not get the labour. Fenmen had had enough of labouring in the mud – and anyway they had never been paid for all the work they had done last time. So Cromwell drafted in prison labour: Scottish prisoners taken at the Battle of Dunbar, Dutch prisoners of war, Frenchmen - even Irishmen. A multi-national army of slaves who had to be carefully guarded for freedom was only a few yards away and there was a fenland community glad to give them shelter – apart that is for the Irish, they were disliked by all!

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Although the night had turned warm the tale Pickwick was hearing about the horrors perpetrated during the drainage of the fens some 200 years earlier caused him to shiver.

As Peck told it the only labour that Vermuyden could get as he strove to dig his newer Bedford River were prisoners of war – Dutch, French and Irish. After a day's slave labour they would be treated to a miserable meal and herded into a rough shelter made of reeds with armed guards posted to ensure they stayed in. But one night two of the sentries died, half-strangled and then finished off with a bullet from their own rifles, as three Irishmen made their escape. The officer in charge was so worried that he rounded up all the remaining Irish, chained them hand and foot and starved them for a couple of days. Then he rigged up some gibbets and hanged every other one. Those who escaped being hung were made to sleep every night under the swinging bodies. But those who escaped into the fens faced an even worse fate.

There were few taverns in the undrained fen, but the drainers knew that those whose job it was to drive the slaves as hard as they could also liked to drown their sorrows as deeply as they could. To allow such men to tramp across the dark and dangerous fenland to a village tavern was a sure invitation to murder or mutilation. There were just too many fenmen with too many grievances, and too many drainers would never be found again.

In any case it was better that the drainers' wages should be spent to the drainers' benefit. So Vermuyden arranged that a tavern should be built close by any stretch of new work they were starting so that the men could buy their ale easily; it made up for some of the money that was constantly being poured into the marshy wastes. One such clay-walled pub was built where the Great Ouse and the Little Ouse combined, a spot called Brandon Creek. It was even lonelier in those days than it is now in the 1830s, and nobody cared to live in the tavern, but in the end an old man and his wife took it over. They hadn't been there long before they were found murdered in their beds.

Suspicion focussed on the three Irishmen escapees and rumour went round that they were hiding up in Southery, a small island beyond Littleport, near the Creek. It was a difficult journey but however hard it was to get into Southery it was even harder to get out of. There were more bodies buried in the peat bogs round the village than there were in the churchyard and even Cromwell's soldiers weren't going to look for them there.

Meanwhile the three escapees were happy and safe in their new home. They enchanted the locals with their tales and song, & turned the head of many a fen girl who was happy to submit to their charms. But one was not so easily wooed. She resisted their flattery – and she resisted most persistently when the Irishmen refused to take no for an answer. Her screams brought a crowd of fenmen to her rescue and the three Irishmen were trussed up hand and foot and carried into the fen for the soldiers to find. But no soldiers were willing to come looking until promises were given that they would be safe – on this one occasion. The men were found guilty of killing the old tavern keeper and his wife. The sentence was death and the execution would be carried out at the scene of the crime.

Two oak piles were driven into the bed of the river and a beam fixed between them. A boat was positioned under the beams, the three prisoners on deck, nooses round their neck. The other ends of the ropes were tied to the beam. But the ropes were too long there was a considerable slack – as the other Irish labourers brought to witness the event were quick to notice. Not only could the Dutch not drain the fens, they couldn't even arrange a decent hanging! But then the horror dawned – the river was tidal and as the tide ebbed, so slowly the boat dropped. They watched as the doomed men stretched themselves to their full height, watched as they stood on tiptoe and watched for all the two hours it took before the tide lowered the boat enough for the men to be swinging clear of the deck. One of the condemned men used his last breath to scream: "May God wreck all the work done here by Dutchmen; that's the last curse of an Irishman". And when it was finally over the gallows was dismantled and the beam used as the mantelpiece in the pub, where it still stands, a warning to all.

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Despite the opposition of fenmen nothing could halt the progress of fen drainage once the civil war was over and, Peck related, by 1653 the battle had been lost – or won, depending on your point of view. In either case there was a great service of thanksgiving in Ely Cathedral to mark the completion of the great enterprise. The two great Bedford rivers were now finished, the mass of water coming along the Great Ouse from Huntingdon would be diverted straight towards the sea, instead of winding its way tortuously through the fens. Now there was a clear channel the rivers would no longer back up and overflow their banks, the land would dry out and become profitable. All the struggle, all the hard work – all the foresight of Sir Myles Sandys and the others would be vindicated.

There was now a New Bedford River separated by from the Old by a strip of land that could be flooded when necessary. One sluice was built at Earith to stop water flowing down the Old Bedford and another to block off the Old West River. This mighty watercourse was instantly reduced to a sluggish stream, only regaining some of its lost majesty when it joined up with the River Cam at Harrimere, near Little Thetford.

But still the river trade to Cambridge would be allowed to continue, unaffected by all this engineering – it had to be, that was the deal that had been agreed right at the start. So where the Great Ouse met the New Bedford, at Denver, another new sluice was built. It would stop the waters from the Wash rushing up the old Ouse – now the New river would take the surge of the tides – but it could be opened to allow the boats with their essential cargoes to continue their journey to the University.

One part remained - a new channel to take the waters from the Lt Ouse, Lark and Wissey and carry them round the edge of the fen, rather than have them drain down into the Ouse. But this was not completed – it could wait.

But elsewhere drainage – and hostility – continued. In the Swaffham, Reach and Bottisham district troops of horse were sent to disperse people breaking down new banks. But when soldiers were set as night watchmen fenmen came down armed with muskets and

overpowered them - forcing the troops to help fill in the dykes. Nor could they not stop people breaking down sluices at Bottisham and even trying to sabotage the great sluice at Denver itself. It got so bad that parliament had to crack down on offenders at Soham - treating them as felons and flinging them into gaol. Such military support had to be paid for by the drainers who raised additional taxes - but people refused to play taxes anyway.

By now most of the drainage work had been done, and people were beginning grudgingly, to see the benefits. Vermuyden left the fens to die in obscurity and poverty and even the hated Myles Sandys passed away and his family became extinct. Soon too Oliver Cromwell became history and before long the King was back – a new King, Charles II.

But while poets sang of the wonders of the now dry fens, so boatmen sang out in protest. They had been promised enough water to sail their boats up to Cambridge – but now the rivers were drying up. Whereas previously barges with 10 chaldron of coal could navigate all the way, now they could carry no more than 2-3 chaldron. The price of freight at Cambridge rose by half and a new body, the Conservators of the River Cam had to be established in 1702 to try and keep the rivers open.

And the floods were back too, even after a Bedford Level Corporation was set up with powers to levy taxes to maintain the drainage work. Because there was a new problem, one that Vermuyden had not envisaged. As the fen lands dried out, so they shrank; and as the land dropped so banks needed to be built alongside the rivers, to keep the water in. Then the fields became waterlogged and people had to start erecting wind pumps to lift the water up and into the rivers – just like they had before all the drainage had started. But now the situation was worse so parishes combined to raise funds for more acts of parliament to establish drainage districts. .

Cornelius Vermuyden's grand scheme was beginning to fall apart at the seams. Then it literally collapsed.

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No sooner had the great drainage schemes been completed, and Cornelius Vermuyden gone away, than things started to go wrong. 'The new Bedford River which was supposed to have solved the problem was having the opposite effect. Before the sluice had been made at the Hermitage, Earith, there had been a flush of water down the Old West to keep the channel clear, now it was a mere streamlet. The rivers were silting up & flooding was increasing.

Peck told how the arguments and protests continued until early 1713, and then the problem resolved itself There came a great tempest of wind and rage of the sea and Denver sluice, by then in poor repair, could not stand the strain. It collapsed & the navigation interest was jubilant. Now the river would be open all the way to Cambridge once more, trade could be resumed - the world was right again.

But soon it turned wrong. Waters from Huntingdon continued to pour down the New Bedford River towards the sea, but the channel that carried it towards King's Lynn was silting up. And water is lazy - it will always find the easiest route. So instead of fighting its way to the Wash, the water coming down the New Bedford just turned right at Denver, and flowed back up the Ouse. There it met the water coming the other way. Two into one will not go, the waters flowed over the banks on to the land to such a depth that the sun could not dry them up. Argument and counter-arguments raged, opinions were sought and rejected before in 1750, years afters its destruction, Denver Sluice was rebuilt.

Even if the land was dry you could never guarantee good crops; bad harvests led to food shortages and food shortages led to riots. In May 1740 disturbances broke out throughout the

region, including Peterborough where food was taken from farmers in the market and rioters boarded boats, carrying away great quantities of wheat, & threatening to murder anybody who tried to strop them. When five of the rioters were committed to gaol others broke down the prison doors and let them out. Peaceable citizens procured firearms to protect their houses.

At Wisbech, near Peck's home village of Parson Drove, wheat was requisitioned and sold off for what the rioters considered a fair price. Then œ80 was collected from local shopkeepers as 'donations' before the rioters went home. The Gentry and richer sort of traders raised a peace- keeping force, 500 strong, and arrested 60 of the rioters. Their intention was to bring them to the Bishop's Gaol in Ely, but the Ely justices wore reluctant to accept them. As they said, "there appears too much of the same discontented spirit and temper about the exportation of grain here, and some motions have been made towards a rising here". The Government ordered troops to proceed to Ely and advised the magistrates to release any prisoners against whom there was insufficient evidence for a successful prosecution

Of the 60 Wisbech rioters 14 were tried at the assize and sentenced to death. But the prospect of mass execution alarmed better-off inhabitants who sent a petition urging clemency "the thought of so severe an execution ... will probably raise a general discontent against those who suppressed the late riot'. The sentences were commuted and the offenders transported for 14 years instead

By 1756 Britain was at war with France and, with troops needed elsewhere, riots at home were harder to put down. In June 1757 trouble broke out in Cambridge when a mob, chiefly of women, stormed a storehouse and carried off wheat. Later another mob assembled having learned that 27 sacks of flour had been collected at Smallbridges - Silver Street. They began to assault the place and, after a vigorous resistance in which seven or eight were wounded, they carried it, forcing the mayor to release one of their number who had been made prisoner. Next day there was an incident at Ely where a murderous mob seized and carried away 200 coomb of wheat.

There were floods in 1762, 1765 and 1768 when fen reeves went out in the early hours of the morning. A woman was sent out to ring a bell to call people to help to stop the water which by five o'clock had run over the banks in many places. It then rained as hard as it could rain, most unmerciful cruel and unrelenting weather. On the Saturday the banks at Over broke and flooded all the country roundabout, driving people from their homes as water reclaimed the fens.

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"I met an old chap at King's Lynn some 20 years back", continued Peck, "name of Low-Fen Bill Hall. He was an old chap then, about 80 years old, and raised in the fen at Heckington, near Sleaford. He was only a fen boy with no education but he'd learned to write and brought out some pamphlets about his life and times – he said he needed to raise some money for the support of an orphan family he'd had thrown on his hands".

Somehow Pickwick acquired a copy of the treatise for it appears amongst his papers, though he obviously needed Peck's help to interpret it for various notes are appended alongside statements that would otherwise be totally obscure as Low-Fen Bill names a number of fen employments and uses rare fen words.

A sketch of Local History relating to the State of the Fens, 1812

An original book, though yet incomplete one,
A treatise if you please I you ask, what does it treat on?
Why such as your parson can't preach on, no doubt,

For here's subjects some parsons know nothing about;

Such as born in a coy and bred in a mill, (that's a duck decoy)
Taught water to grind, and ducks for to kill; (pumping water off the land)
Seeing coots clapper claw, laying flat on their backs, (a coot lays with its feet up when attacked)
Standing upright to row and crowning of jacks; (fen gunners stand up in their punt and push themselves along – and during cold weather you can see pike under the clear ice so you follow them till they're tired, cut a hole above them and when they come up for air you 'crown' them)

Laying spring nets for to catch ruff and reeve,
Stretched out in a boat with a shade to deceive; (a cover to stop the birds seeing you)
Taking geese, ducks, and coots, with nets upon stakes,
Riding in a calm day for to catch moulted drakes; (they can't fly when moulting and you can catch them with dogs)

Gathering eggs to the top of one's wish,
Cutting tracks in the flaggs for decoying of fish;(two long scythe blades fastened behind the boat to cut a track in the reeds along which the fish swim)
Seeing rudds run by shoals 'bout the side of Gill sike,(a stream that's dry in summer)
Being dreadfully venom'd by rolling in slike; (stagnant water or mud)

Looking hingles, and sprinks, trammels, hop-nets and teanings, (the first two are snares made with a horsehair loop and willow springs for catching snipe, & other kinds of fish net)
Few parsons, I think, can explain all their meanings;
In theory, no doubt, they may pretty nigh do,
But the practical part they have never gone through.

"Old Bill was a grand old chap, with a wonderful memory", Peck added – "he told me one thing in particular: 'When I lived at Whaplode Drove, my wife and I stood leaning upon our outward gate, looking southward; when a cloud neither enormous nor inconsiderable, passed about parallel to the Dog and Doublet from us, but not the least appearance of rain from it. Suddenly a spout hung from it in quite a slanting position and in a very few seconds of time, another sprung from Whittlesea mere, in a slanting position also and met it. We could immediately see the water flow into the cloud, with the swiftest rapidity, and as it approached to a perpendicular the more enormous it became; oncoming to a perpendicular, it made a stand for a considerable time, and swelled to a most prodigious degree, when suddenly it hoisted up a regular sized cloud; and we could see the light under it for a quarter of a minute's time; the upper-cloud separated from it, only holding by the original spout, and seemed to drag it into its proper region; then dwindled and left its hold'."

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Farmer Peck related the story of the great drowned of February 1797, as it had been related to him by Bill Stimpson of Littleport. Bill had been just a lad in those days and lived with his family right down in the fen, in an old house.

“It was on a Saturday the bank broke some way from us, and it was late in the afternoon when a man on horse-back came round to our farm, calling out, ‘The bank's broke! The bank's broke!’ Everybody knew what that meant, and we began getting the cattle together and moving them to a place of safety before the water was on them. All our men were at work at some distance from the house, but they soon came to us, driving the stock before them, for they had heard the roar of the water as it came pouring over the river bank.

Our barn was full of corn, some of it wheat in sacks, but most of it oats, which had been threshed but not dressed, and the people who came by our way told us the water was coming on fast, and the barn would certainly be flooded. Mother begged them to stop and help move the corn, but they were all hurrying to look after their own property. We got the wheat sacks moved into the house, but the oats all lay on the barn floor, and my poor mother cried and fretted lest they should be all spoilt. My sister and her servant, alongside of my mother and myself, worked all night to dress the oats and move it into the house and got the last lot out just as the water was starting to come into the barn. Next morning we got the corn all sent away, and only just in time, for the water was rising so fast that the roads were soon under water and all communication with the town stopped. It was a terrible time, for the wind blew, and the rain came down in torrents, and in a few days there were 30,000 acres under water.

All the people who could went into the towns, but some of them were obliged to stay to look after their property. The dealers were in luck, for they used to go round to the farms and buy up the live-stock almost at their own price, people knowing if they did not sell them they would be either drowned or starved. We had got our cattle as well as our corn safely to Littleport, where my eldest sister's husband found accommodation for them, but I have heard him say he had to give £60 for a small stack of hay to keep them alive.

By Wednesday morning the water was in our house, but we did not mind much now the stock and corn were saved, and we were to go to Littleport ourselves next day. We packed everything we could not take with us in the upstairs rooms, and we went to bed early so as to be ready to move in good time in the morning. As we were going to bed, father looked out and said he feared it was going to be a frost. I was a child, and only thought of possible skating; but when I woke next morning and looked out, I knew why my father had said he ‘feared’ it

There would be no going away for us that day, for a sharp frost had set in, and we were frozen up. The ice was not firm enough to walk upon, but it would be impossible to use a boat. So there we were, mother, father, my eldest brother and I, shut up in a house quite away from any other, with the water seven feet deep all around us!

We had to live upstairs, for the lower rooms were full, and day after day we kept hoping the frost would go and some help come to us. We had a supply of bread and bacon but we could not bake, for the water in the kitchen ran into the oven's mouth, and that soon ran out

So we stayed on, day after day. We brought a horse-bridge, that we used for putting across the dykes and ditches for the horses to go over into the fields, into the kitchen. I was fond of skating and used to sit down on that and put on my pattens, and skate about inside the house. Then I’d skate right out at the door, which always stood wide open - it had been left so while the men were loading the corn, and then the water came in, and it could not be shut. Every

farm then had its drainage windmill and one day I skated into ours. I heard a fluttering noise and then I saw two birds flying about. I got them into a corner and caught them, and then I saw they were partridges, which had taken refuge there from the cold and storm outside. So I took my brace of birds home in high glee, and we had one good dinner while we were kept prisoners.

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Bill Stimpson had told Peck of his experiences trapped in a flooded house at Littleport during the Great Drowned of 1796, the water having turned to ice – too thin for a man to walk on, but too thick to boat through.
"After a day or two the wind rose, and we had very stormy weather. Then it snowed, I remember, and then it hailed and rained in torrents, and the ice began to break up and float in great pieces. And as it floated, if it came against any obstruction it packed, and large masses, piled one on another, would come bang-bang against our house till we thought it must come down.

Sometimes wood and hay, and even household furniture and farm implements that had been washed away in the flood, would come down with the ice, and get piled up in heaps against the walls and the garden fence. And one night, when the wind roared, and the ice and lumber kept knocking against the walls, even I could not sleep. The house shook and groaned, and something hard kept thumping against the bedroom wall. Our old dog howled without ceasing, and it was an awful night altogether, and one I have never forgotten.

My poor mother, who had kept up so bravely till then, quite broke down, and said we must certainly be washed away with the house. Father and my brother never went to bed at all, and as soon as morning broke we were all looking out, except mother, who sat crouching over the turf fire.

What a look-out that was! Where the green fields and corn land had been, nothing was now to be seen but one great sheet of water, as far as the eye could reach; only broken here and there by a tree-top, a haystack, or the roof of a cattle-shed, with the great blocks of ice floating about looking like icebergs, and lodging against any obstruction.

I remember how cold and dreary it all seemed, and how I shivered as I turned to the fire. I can see, too, the look on my brother's face. He was never very strong, and that morning he seemed quite worn out. I don't think we any of us had any breakfast, and even I was fairly beaten, and laid my head on my mother's lap and cried. My father kept up best, and tried to comfort us by saying help would soon come; and sure enough, about noon-day, as he stood looking out again, he called out, 'They're coming at last!'

We were all at the window in a minute, but could see nothing but some black specks a long way off, which might be anything. But father was right, and we could soon make out two boats full of men coming towards us. How anxiously we watched them, and how long it seemed before they reached us! They were in lighters, and it was no easy matter to get them along, for though the water was seven feet deep, there were mud banks, and stumps of trees, and other obstacles in the way. They had no oars - nobody ever saw oars in the fen in those days - we all used 'spreads', long poles with a bit of cross-wood at the end. But it was hard work to keep these lighters going with spreads, and it seemed if they would never get to us. They did at last, though, and what a shout there was, to be sure, when my father opened the window and we all looked out. They were our own men, and some others from Littleport, and very glad they seemed to find us all alive.

They got the boats up to the doorway, and then came in to take rest and refreshment, for they were nearly exhausted with their hard work. My dear sister had sent food and beer enough

for us and the men too, but we did not lose much time, and had soon got together the things we wanted to take with us.

When we got into the boats we found out what it was which had alarmed us so in the night. A little boat, which my brother used to go wild-duck shooting in, had been washed down with the lumps of ice, and as the ice packed had got hoisted up right under the caves of the roof, and so had kept bumping against the wall of my bedroom. It was fixed quite fast now, and in it was the little dog whose howling had also disturbed us. Now, hearing voices, it came to the side of the boat and looked over at us, and with some difficulty my brother and one of the men got it down.

Well we got off at last. I went with father and mother in the first lighter, and we took with us our clothes and more valuable goods. My brother followed in the next, in which they packed our bedding and as many other things as they could bring; but we had to leave the larger articles of furniture to their fate. We never expected to see them again, or the house either, for that matter, for everybody thought it must come down.

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Bill Stimpson had shuddered as he recalled his family's escape from their ice-bound farmhouse in Littleport fen during that terrible February of 1796:

"I fancied our troubles would be over when we were once in the boats, but I soon found out my mistake. The lighters were so heavily laden that we were only a few inches from the water, and we had to keep a sharp look-out for anything that might be floating about. Besides we had to keep right facing the wind, for if we had got it the least sideways to us we must have gone over. You must remember we were going right across country, over ditches and dykes, and the water seven feet deep over the land!

The men did work, and no mistake, and my father and brother as hard as any of them. My mother hardly spoke, but sat like one stunned; I suppose she must have been quite worn out. I sat still, thinking that if I only got safe to land I should never want to go on the water again. The ice was quite thick in places, so that we had to break it as we went along; and we were constantly meeting and passing great heaps of things that the flood had washed away. Once we passed a place where some cottages had stood, and my father asked whether the people had been got out, and the men said 'yes', but that the pigs were drowned.

Although the men worked so hard we got on but slowly, and there was no chance of our reaching Littleport that night; so we made for a farmhouse that stood higher than the land around, and which had not suffered so much. The people who lived there took us in, and were very kind, but the house was like an inn, it was so full of people who, like us, had been flooded out; and the yards, and even the garden, were full of horses and cattle. Of course they could not give us all beds, and the men slept on sofas and chairs, or lay upon the floors. Our men were put in an out-house where they had been picking hemp. We got off early in the morning, and there was not so much wind as the day before, but still it was hard work pulling and it was quite afternoon when we got to Littleport, and could see the people running along the top of the bank to see us come in.

I shall never forget our landing. I could hardly keep still while they were getting the lighters alongside the landing-place; we were not long getting on to dry land. There stood my dear sisters, one with her husband and children, and my brothers, who had come from another farm of my father's, and who had given us up for lost. There were crowds of people besides, standing about, but they let our own folks come forward to meet us. And then how they cheered us, and shouted out words of welcome! And how my sisters did hug and kiss us, and

my poor mother, who had seemed turned to stone before, had a good cry when she saw her children standing waiting for us.

My sister's husband had done everything for us - seen to our cattle and got a little house for us; but they would not let us leave them until we had quite recovered from the effects of our long captivity and tedious journey. I remember how my sister cried as we talked it over that evening, and she told us how they feared that if we were not drowned we should be starved; and how, day after day, they had tried to get provisions to us. Once they had packed some in a boat, and put it on a sledge, but the ice broke and let them in. Another time they sent men in a boat with axes to break the ice as they went, but they only got a few boats' length, and had to give up.

In a few days we were in our little house, and began to feel settled once more. Still it was a sad and anxious time, for the land was under water all that summer, and we could sow no crops. So when wheat was a guinea a bushel we had none to sell, but had to buy flour at seven shillings a stone for our own use. But we were better off than hundreds, and many of those we knew had lost their all.
It was on the 11th February, 1796, that the bank broke, and it was on the 21st that we left our old house, never expecting to see it again. But part of it is standing still and occupied by a labourer's family. We did not get back to it till the Easter of the following year, but as the floods went down, we went several times to fetch the furniture we had left, to our house in Littleport. I used to go in a boat with my father and a man to get roots for the cattle. They would put on their fen boots who came right up to their hips, and when they came to the turnip field would get out of the boat and pull up the turnips from under the water, and throw them up into the boat.

"I have seen other floods since then, and had my own farm under water once; but, I remember this, the "Great Drowned', as we always called it, best of all", Stimpson had told Peck. But all that was some 40 years ago – surely things were better now, Pickwick wondered.

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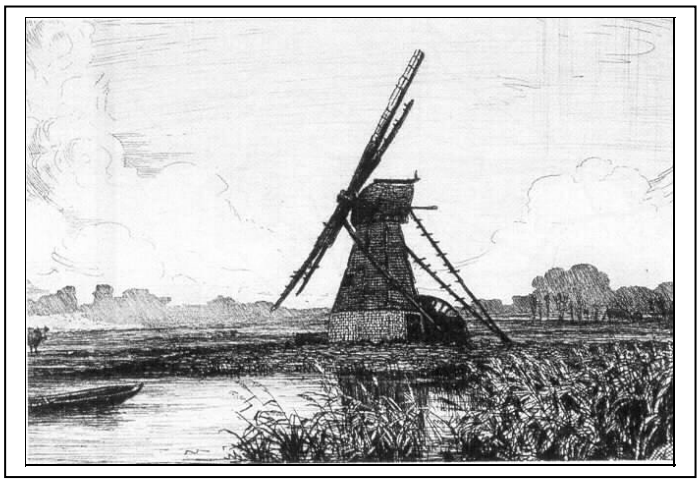
Farmer Peck from Parson Drove was not sure that the condition of the fens had improved since the inundation of 1796. In fact he felt flooding was now more frequent than ever– and he put the blame at the door of upland parishes to the south. They had enclosed their land and improved their drainage. Water which had previous lain on their land till it evaporated now ran more quickly into the ditches. And the ditches conveyed it more speedily into the river, so that at St Ives the floods on the Ouse meadows were more sudden than formerly and now just eight hours of heavy rain brings a flood.

But it was more complicated than that: the interior of the fen had subsided to a lower level by various efforts made to drain it, for as the water had been taken away so the level of the soil dropped & the ditches needed to be dug deeper. Wind pumps were needed to push the water up out of the ditches into the higher rivers. Such works were expensive and farmers, like himself, had to combine to obtain expensive Acts of Parliament to establish drainage districts to improve areas of land, with powers to raise money by levying taxes on landowners who were already in debt.



And it was not just a case of erecting wind pumps and then forgetting them. There had to be people to work them.

When a mill was isolated deep in the fen then it had to provide a home as well as a place of work for the miller. Inside a massive wooden spindle stood in the centre of the mill, terminating in a large set of cogs at the top which communicated with the arms of the sails. And in one dark corner would be a bed and wooden chest, a fireplace but no chimney – the peaty smoke would easily find its way out through the gaps in the wooden walls of the mill.

The mills were in need of constant maintenance to ensure they were weatherproof and did not start to subside into the dark black peaty soil. The drains needed to be kept clear of weed and reed and slubbed out from time to time. But for many a long hour there was little for the miller to do except brood in his solitude, indulge in his love of tobacco or opium, or enhance his income through fishing or eel-catching in the drain or river. And often these pastimes seemed to take all his time – until the Drainage Commissioners cracked the whip, or stopped his wages to bring him back into line.

When there was pumping to be done and a steady wind was blowing all was relatively simple. But if the wind veered round the top of the mill had to be turned to compensate. There was the ever-present worry of a sudden squall sending wind shrieking across the open landscape. The mill keeper would have to be quickly on hand to remove the canvas from the sails – which were in some cases about forty feet long - otherwise the wind could wrench the sails from their bearings, leaving them swinging and unsafe. Then men would be sent with saw, axe and ropes to pull the sails down, a millwright despatched to fit them up again, and the Commissioners would be looking for another mill-keeper

At other times something might break, leaving the sails revolving too quickly, causing friction that could easily set alight the old wooden timbers. Peck had seen the effect of this at first hand in March 1826 when the White Engine, a large mill for draining St Mary's parish took fire at nine o'clock in the evening and all burnt down. Next day he'd seen the ruins, a black mass of ashes & the heavy stones which had been red-hot scattered about. Fortunately they were insured and the Sun Fire Office had paid out £1,000. But it cost the parish over £1,630 for a new mill, brick tower, sails and cast-iron gear. That same night another mill, at Murrow, had almost suffered the same fate after the brake and brake wheel caught fire.

And that was just a stiff breeze – a proper gale could catch the entire mill, ripping it from its foundations and sending it walking across the fen till its structure gave way and was scattered across the fields. Even when the mills were working they were contributing to the problems of drainage, for as well as water they constantly pushed mud into the rivers. Over a few years this built up sediment on the bottom of the river, reducing its flow and needing constant work to clean it out.

But the more they drained the fen, the more the fen shrunk and soon one pump could no longer lift the water high enough. So a second pump had to be installed alongside the first, raising the water into a reservoir from which it could be lifted into the river. Now the time had come when these wind pumps were just not able to do the job. Something else was needed – and that something else was steam. But while local millwrights and blacksmiths might be able to erect windmills, where would they get a steam engine?

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Peck had come down from Parson Drove to see for himself one of the latest steam engines installed to drain the fens and to hear from its engineer, Mr Stanley just what differences it had made.

Stretham's new steam drainage engine stood on the Old West River, once the most important in Cambridgeshire, carrying all the water that fell on the highlands of Bedfordshire and Huntingdonshire down towards the sea. Once too it had carried boats making their journey

between Cambridge and Bedford – but all that had been before the Dutch drainers had built the two great Bedford rivers. These now took that water straight to the sea, leaving the Old West to ooze more slowly between its high riverbanks, a reminder of earlier times. But they were needed now even more than before, for the peat fenlands alongside had shrunk and wasted away as the water had been drained from them. When Peck had visited the river had overflowed its normal little channel and was spreading out towards those high banks; still all was safe for now.

Looking across the fen towards Wicken he could catch glimpse of the wooden drainage windmills, their sails turning as they worked their scoop wheels, pushing the water from the fen drains and up into the higher river Cam. Until recently had been three of these mills along this stretch of the Old West too, but windmills were inefficient – it was as the fenland poet, William Harrison had put it:

Those poor old mills had done their best
To have the drainage wants redress'd
Though often in the time of need
Found anything but "friends indeed".
When winds were low and floods were high
With outstretched pionions to the sky,
They stood in utter helplessness,
Exchanging signals of distress;
While murmurs frequent and profound
Arose from those whose lands were drown'd

So in 1813 the Commissioners responsible for draining the Waterbeach Level had sought advice from John Rennie who recommended the installation of a steam engine at the junction of the Ouse and Cam together with the construction of additional drains and ditches. But the cost was too high to be contemplated. Sixteen years later things had deteriorated to such an extent that they had no alternative. This time the Commissioners had turned to Joseph Glynn, a civil engineer who had installed a number of such machines. Having taken advice tenders had been invited in June 1831 and that of the Butterley Company accepted – a massive £2,900. Nor was that all – it had cost £2,050 for the brick building to house it. But then they had to find a site capable of sustaining such a weight in an area where the soil was constantly sinking.

The giant iron pieces had to be brought by barge along the river – the roads being totally unable to cope with such weighty structures. The unloading and assembly had attracted great interest, not least from local farmers and the village folk who had strolled down the Green End to see the work in progress. It had taken months to get it all up and some people still found the mighty chimney seemed too dominant and intrusive in the flat landscape, it seemed to compete for attention with the graceful spire of the village church; others compared it unfavourably with the building that dominated the landscape to the north – Ely cathedral. But that was progress.

The steam engine was much more powerful than wind pumps, it could lift more water and would work whenever the boilers had been stoked up – again Harrison had put it well:

These Fens have oft times been by Water drown'd
Science a remedy in Water found
The power of Steam, she said, shall be employ'd
And the Destroyer by herself destroy'd

But it needed coal to fire the boilers, and coal was dependent on water. For supplies of the large coal lumps came down the rivers by barge and high tides at King's Lynn coupled with flooding further downstream could delay the arrival of those barges. There was another problem too – ice. For frozen rivers might be ideal for skaters, but it could stop the boats bringing the coal. And if the ice and snow melted too quickly and filled up the drainage ditches before the engine was up to power then the water might overflow on to the land – that very land the farmers had paid high taxes to keep dry, the farmers who paid Stanley's wages. Being a drainage engineer had its problems!

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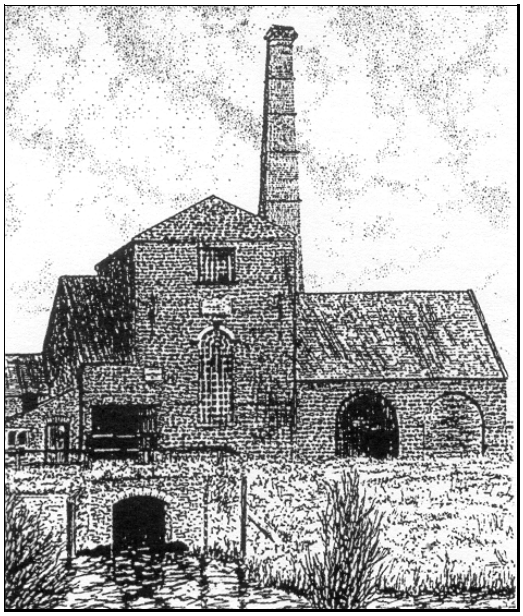
Peck from Parson Drove had been at the new fen pumping station at Stretham when the barges had arrived carrying the coal to feed its giant boilers. He watched the delicate manoeuvring that bought the heavily-laden craft alongside the river bank, watched as long planks were laid from the barge up to the top of the river bank, and then up yet higher to the weighbridge on the top of the wall that surrounded the coal yard.

Meanwhile coal was being loaded into wheelbarrows which were, incredibly, pushed up those narrow plank walkways, the wood bending under the weight. Then he heard the large lumps being tipped safely inside, saw the dust rising and slowly settling again. Given the hardships of the time this coal was an expensive commodity, hence the need for the high surrounding wall – but what was beyond that wall, what was it like inside that engine house. He had to find out, for he himself was charged with establishing similar steam engines up in his area of the fens.

There was only one thing for it – he volunteered his assistance in offloading the coal; but the bargee dare not let him help – he must approach the engineer, Mr Stanley. But Stanley was busy, scuttling here and there, overseeing every operation, watching every lump being weighed in – and watching too to ensure that nobody got inside his engine house. For that was his domain. It was, in the context of the fenland, a massive piece of engineering. It was the latest technology, it was sure to excite the attention of ignorant fen folk who would want to come and gawk, to gape and wonder, to prod and pry, to ask questions and get in the way. And what went on inside those walls was not for them to know. It was far beyond their comprehension, it was his world. And he was not going to open it up – not even for Farmer Peck!



So Peck had to leave or be thrown in the river. But somehow he had to find out what was in there, and how it worked. A few yards along the bank, on the other side of a rickety wooden bridge, stood a riverside inn, a rough establishment serving strong beer – or at least so its sign proclaimed – to the farm labourers and to the boatmen. It was well away from the village and so was a relatively safe spot for the barges to stop overnight. With one member of the crew on lookout in case of problems with local inhabitants who felt their need for the cargo was greater than its legitimate owner, the others could adjourn inside, washing down the coal dust amidst the dust of the beer house.

And it was here that Peck met one man who could tell him what he needed to know – Ron Clarke, the stoker, who, with only a slight prompting and the odd jug of ale, was happy to spill the secrets of the Stretham new engine and its two coal-fired boilers.
He was adamant, it was the stoker who controlled the engine; through his skilful manipulation of coal, dampers and draught he could ensure it would go when needed. But it was not instant power, as Clarke explained: "You won't get steam in these great big boilers for twenty-four, thirty-six, perhaps forty-eight hours and you just can't do anything about it! Before you can even think about lighting that boiler you have got to have the knowledge to build a horse shoe fire, what we call a slow fire, because there is no earthly use you thinking you are going to rush that. Right! So what I do, is light this slow fire. I use big lumps of coal, shoved well back from the mouth of the furnace, built in a horse shoe shape. Inside them I put some nice little bits about as big as your two fists put together and inside them some kindling and very small coal. I chuck some old oily waste rags on there and set her off. Now you can let her burn nice and slowly; what I'm trying to do is to get a nice fire that will give us about a barrow-full of red-hot coal.

"If we're going to run the engine tomorrow, I'll light this fire sometime this afternoon; and then I watch it. That's my job. I watch that fire to see that it keeps burning nice and bright. When she has burnt right through and you've a whole heap of red hot fire, I get one of those long tools and push this fire all over the bars. Then I chuck a couple of barrow-loads of good bits on there, quick as I can, and lift the damper a little bit more and let her really go. Now I'll have this mass of fire going.

"From time to time Stanley will come down and in his superior fashion, run the back of his hand all round the front of the boiler and especially underneath - that little door where the man goes in to clean the boilers occasionally - if that's still cold he'll moan. The last thing at night I'll bring in a couple of barrow-loads of real good bits of coal - weighing a couple of stone - and plonk them on, then I close her up and shut the damper down to within about three to six inches, and leave her nicely tucked up"

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Stoker Clarke settled, somewhat uncomfortably, in the draughty snug of the Strong Beer House beside the Old West River and looked out at the chimney of the new Stretham fen pumping engine. He was looking for the sight of smoke emerging from the boilers beneath, and was delighted not to see any – that was the mark of an experienced stoker.

When the engine was being prepared up for operation he would be in the boiler room 6 o'clock in the morning. Assuming the night had gone well the boiler would still be warming up. "So when I come inside that door I'm met by a lovely warm smell and know that everything is all right. I pull up the damper to half way. The night before I'll have brought in four or five barrow-loads of coal and cracked them up and they are nicely lying there. So I whip them on.

"There is an art in stoking those boilers; this is the way I do it. Your first shovel-full will hit the bridge, your next one will lay beside it on the left hand side and your next one on the right hand side. You then work your way right up doing that: one in the middle, one on the left and one on the right, one in the middle, one at the left, one at the right and work your way right up to the door. Bang the door to, that's it, that's your boiler's finished. Now go to your next boiler and do the same thing.

"Sometimes, having got her nicely lit you have to open the furnace doors just a crack to let some air in, otherwise you'll be smoked to death – and black smoke coming out of a chimney is wasted fuel, and bad stoking. Another engine I know, they have two stokers and when it's

running 24 hours a day one man will do twelve hours and the other twelve hours. Now one man is very heavy handed. He'll fill her up to the top and people will say 'We know who's stoking today, because the black flag is out' – there's clouds of smoke. But the chap who taught me would rather stoke up twice in an hour, lightly, and keep a bright fire, rather than sling on half a ton of coal and have a black fire. Believe you me, a stoker has control of that engine. He can make that engine race. If he is slack and can't fire up properly, you've always got a black fire, black bars and everything, the bloke indoors there inside the engine-room will soon be downstairs and asking, 'What are you up to?' because his steam will drop. So, really and truly these beam engines are regulated from the stoke-hole"

Peck was beginning to realise there was much more to stoking than met the eye, and that would be an important lesson for him to take back to his own drainage commissioners up at Parson Drove. But what he really wanted to know was how the pumping engine actually worked, and Engineer Stanley had already made it plain that he was not going to tell him. Perhaps stoker Clarke knew – and indeed he did!

"I'm not going to try and pretend to tell you a lot of technical details about the engine. Because I don't know them, but I know how to run it because Mr Stanley showed me, and I've seen him start it several times. So I know within a little what to do. If the engine's in its starting position and we've got five or six pounds of steam we open the throttle valve on the cylinder landing and let the steam through.

Then we have to start it. There are two handles one larger than the other – that's the starting handle & the other one is the gear lever. So you pull that starting handle back. Now on that first pull back the engine may move a couple or three feet, she may in fact come just up to stop dead centre, and that is what you do not let her do. You do not under any circumstances let that engine stop at either bottom or top dead centre or else you are in the hell of a mess. You have a cylinder full of steam - and that's when Stanley has to fetch me in, because you have to bar that engine round. There are slots in the flywheel and you have to put a crowbar in them and heave it round, then you quickly push that starting handle over and let her swing back to where she was. Bring her over a little bit more, perhaps she will gain a couple of foot this time. Swing her back and so you rock her up and she may need perhaps three, four, five or six good rocks, it just depends on how cold it is or whatever. Eventually she will come right over, so you give her a couple of revolutions. That's a wonderful feeling - you and you alone are handling that engine, it is a man controlled engine. So we will do a couple of revs, then we turn to this gear lever, we pull it out and it will slip forward and engage and the engine is away. But while the engineer stands there, knowing he's got it going, me, the poor old stoker's got to get back quick to my boilers – cos' I'll have lost no end of steam and have to work like hell to get it back.

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Once one of the giant steam fen drainage engines was going it would work all day, and sometimes for day after day - it had to. Its job was to push the water out of the fen drains and get it up into the river, If the engine was working efficiently it could lower the water by perhaps twelve inches a day - a tremendous improvement on the old wind scoopwheels. But it was still not much if there was a downpour and nature always seemed intent in sending as much rain as she could to fill the drains up quicker than the pump could empty them

And when the engine was working, and for however long it worked, the engine driver had to be constantly on the prowl; right through the night by the light of a lamp - though soon he knew every inch of the machinery and could tell instinctively when a bearing needed lubricating or an oiling point filled up. As the fen winds howled & the gales battered the tall engine house he carefully tended his machine, constantly alert for any hint of malfunction.

And in the boiler room stoker Clarke was watching his fires, adding coal when necessary, raking out ashes, ensuring unceasing steam was available to power the pumps.

But occasionally, Clarke told Peck, things could go wrong - and then life got very exciting indeed!
"Sometimes you have got to stop in a hell of a hurry - I remember once (not here) we were going to shut down at about one o'clock. But then about ten o'clock, I had just fired up of course – three barrow loads of coal on each furnace - you are always just fired up when these things happen and always full of steam or coal or something. But I was full of both, I had got a real good head of steam, and I had just fired up. And I thought to myself, well now I am going to sit down here and watch the world go by.

"I casually glanced at me water gauge, as I had been told to by the old stoker. He taught me many things. When you stand here he said, 'Put your hand on top of the ball valve. If that's cold you're in clover. If that's hot, for Gods sake start to do something. And get some water through, otherwise you are going to be in trouble. Another thing is, each time you close them doors, cock your eve at the water gauge. Get into that habit' which I did. I got into the habit of doing all those things. And as I cocked thy eye at the water gauge I thought, 'Cor, that's low!' I opened me water valve, stood and watched. Nothing happened. Blimey!

"I then felt me water valve and it was hot! The water was not there. What the hell's gone wrong? So I opened the engine room door and yelled, 'Charlie'. Charlie, who was the engine man came belloping down the steps and I said "Look! I have not got any water, and I have just fired up. Two furnaces full of coal. What the hell am I going to do?' He said, 'I don't know mate'. Even he was scared. Well, away he went and he came back again and he said, 'One of the connectors is broken, on top of the water pump, so the pump is not working. The rod is still working but there is no connection!' So I said, 'Blimey! What are we going to do?' He said, 'Well, you will bust her if we don't get them fires out'.

"So I had to get the long hoe, a blooming great thing, about twelve foot long, made of iron; heavy; and I had to pull all this live coal out - out of two furnaces. That was one of the warmest jobs I've ever had in my life. Burnt my shoes! That is the truth. I burnt the soles right off my shoes. But what the hell could you do? Charlie was there and he was chucking the coal outside into the yard. I pulled her out and then he went and stopped the engine, and everything became nice and calm and quiet. But we took a terrible chance remaining at the stoke holes. Either the boilers could have exploded or the plugs could have melted and then the remaining water and the high pressure steam would have spewed out all over us carrying with it all the remaining hot coals. I don't think we realised just what we were doing. Today I would say, 'What the hell, I'm off.' But we did not think about it at the time. All we thought about was that would have been an act of cowardice, call it what you like. Our instinct told us to remain at our post and get those fires out, which we did!"

And Peck's instinct was to ensure that if the Parson Drove drainage district was ever to invest in such a massive engine as that at Stretham then the commissioners should certainly invest in a man like Ron Clarke to help run it.

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Peck had continued his journey by horse along the top of the bank of the Old West River. He crossed the turnpike road at Stretham ferry bridge and continued riding high above the land till he reached the Twentypence Ferry, its floating bridge almost large enough to span the river without moving. Then it was a pleasant ride along a grassy drove towards his destination, the famous cheese-making village of Cottenham, through lush pasture where the

suckling of calves for the London market was carried on to great advantage, fields full of cows and horses. It was this herbage that accounted for the superiority of the cheeses, a single Cottenham soft cream cheese and a double Cottenham, the more famous blue cheese. Almost every house in the village had its own dairy and cheese room; regular consignments left for London by wagons, and the road to Cambridge would be packed with carts carrying vast quantities for sale at the annual Stourbridge Fair. Peck had been charged by his wife to obtain a supply in the village, rather than pay the inflated prices charged by the Parson Drove shopkeepers.

He finally reached the village near the church just as candles were being lighted for the night and set about to find accommodation. “Cottenham has a number of pubs”, he told Pickwick: “there was the Lord Nelson in the High Street kept by the Kimpton family for more than 30 years, the Spread Eagle and the King’s Head. But none of them had rooms. There were a couple of new places – the Cross Keys owned by James Ivatt, a well-established family who seemed intent on telling me his life story, and the Chequers. That had only been open and year and had five bedchambers and a pump of good water but the landlord, John Christmas, did not seem to know what he was about so I left. The Black Horse had a Stock Club and the Fountain was home to the Fountain Cattle Insurance Company – and they were full of people talking cattle problems.

“In fact several of the pubs had too close a connection with the cattle trade for my liking. The Three Horseshoes is one of the most popular of Cottenham inns and they hold the calf sales there. It was full of drovers lugging their beer – well the place was so awash with calves tails and halters they had to hug their pot of ale to their body in the inside crook of their arm so they shouldn’t be knocked from the tables. I might be from the fens but I wasn’t sure I wished to be associated with such characters!

“I thought I’d found the ideal pub, because the White Horse housed the annual Ordermakers Feast – they’re the Parish Officers. But somebody told me that although they ate there the Ordermakers did not buy their meal from the pub. Instead they bought the beef and mutton from the butchers, the meal for the bread & the flour for the puddings from the millers and thought it necessary to purchase two buckets of coal to warm the room. Perhaps that said something for the quality of the food and the warmth of the welcome there!”

Peck continued: “I inquired for lodgings as I walked down the street, but could not find any; as it was getting late I even tried at the newly built ‘London Cottage’, hoping the occupants would make me welcome, but there was nobody at home. The failure of my efforts to get a bed made me uncomfortable, so I asked an urchin who informed me there was one pub I’d missed - the

Red Lion inn kept by Mr Murfitt. On going there and inquiring for a bed the landlord said he would be very sorry for a man like me to be obliged to spend the night in the open, and that if I would accept of such lodgings as he could provide I might spend the night beneath his roof. So I did"

It was here that he met a fellow lodger - Richard Rolph, known as the blind man of Lakenheath, a former Wesleyan local preacher. "We had an interesting evening and next day I went with him to visit another prominent dissenter, a highly respected and self-taught Baptist Minister called Thomas Sutton. And it seems that Cottenham is a hotbed of nonconformity. Four years ago there was a mass meeting of over 600 dissenters; it was a very cold day so somebody suggested adjourning to the dissenting meeting-house – but they wouldn't. Then Jonas Tebbutt took the chair and starting ranting on about 'the greed of the black-footed locusts who claimed one tithe of the revenue to maintain bloated Archbishops and Bishops, lazy Deans and useless Canons and Prebendaries'. At the end of this Mr Folkes proposed a vote of thanks and added that how 'he wished to God he had that evening to preach the funeral sermon of that hoary harlot, Mother-Church, which was a blast and nuisance upon the earth, both black, bloody and useless; and he would say blessed be those hands that should first hurl her to dark perdition among the fiends, there to be honouring and be honoured by the Devil'. And that warmed up the 600 congregation who were freezing to death – they clapped and cheered something wonderful!"

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It was no wonder the progress of nonconformity was having an easy passage in Cottenham, Peck was told, for the Rector, the Rev Martin Davy was never there, never took services and didn't live in the rectory. Instead he preferred to spend his time in his college - and as Master of Gonville and Caius he had much to occupy him. But as Davy was getting a little old he was getting a little odd - he'd already chosen his coffin, one made of zinc which was to be put inside another made of oak. For he'd seen how at a funeral in Caius the bearers had staggered under the weight of a lead coffin and decided to commission a lighter one in zinc instead.

In his absences church services were being taken by a succession of curates, the most successful of which was Rev Adam Fitch who'd established a Church Sunday-School five years earlier. At their annual treat in the school room the young congregation had marvelled at the clear and impressive voice of the Rev Mr Cais of Trinity college who had enthralled all 150 people present. Afterwards, said Thomas Sutton, the Baptist minister, it was a delight to see the joyous hearts and smiling faces of the children - so different from the ranting nonconformists.

But such was the way relations between the Cottenham congregations were going it would not be surprising if there were not to be a complete split, not only in life but death. Several curates were refusing to bury nonconformists and at one stage the coffins of six dissenters had been piled up outside the church. And that was prompting the nonconformists to consider buying their own plot of land in Lambs Lane.

Thomas Sutton, the Baptist minister, had been compiling a poem – in fact it had been just published by Edward Wade in Petty Cury. In it he recorded his life story from his childhood as a shepherd. He had seen floods and he had seen fires, the worst of which had swept the village in 1827.

The fire had been started deliberately in William Ivatt's haystack and spread along the High Street, near the green:

> "The sound of Fire through every street and lane
> Where, where, tis answered 'Near the village green'
> Where soon, too soon. the spiry flame is seen

Tis like some dread volcano rising high
The smokey columns darken all the sky.

The flames destroyed more and more property, spreading to houses and cottages on Histon Road, and claiming victims – some animal

Roofs, beams and girders into ruin fall
The pigs and poultry burn - hark now at the scream.

Some human; William Carrier a young servant boy employed by John Taylor went back to his room during the fire to rescue his clothes:

The red flame rages, laughing, running, gleaming
With awful fangs infolds the village boy
Which tumbling roofs and chambers soon destroy
.

The Cottenham fire engine was soon on the spot and was joined by the Willingham engine and those of the Norwich Union, Royal Exchange, Sun, Hertfordshire and Phoenix insurance companies which had galloped in from Cambridge, but by now the flames were intense:

Spreading his burning wings with fiery singeings
Moves uncontrolled amidst the clash of engines
Defying all their well-directed power.
Their seven-fold stream fell one continued shower
But chief fell in vain –

At last it was finally tamed:

… hark! now what crying
What mingled voices! praying, laughing, lying
But desolation reign'd where joy has been
And theft and revel closed the dismal scene"

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John Peck's new acquaintance, Richard Rolph, the blind Wesleyan preacher of Lakenheath, enjoined Peck to accompany him on a pilgrimage to the neighbouring village of Oakington, where his eyes should see what Rolph's could not, a sight he would never forget.

So they had started on their journey in the cool of the early morning and were soon in open countryside; despite his blindness Rolph strode out confidently and regularly interrupted his conversation to comment on the song of a bird or some new smell.

As he walked he told how nonconformity had grown in the area: Cambridgeshire has a tradition of religious dissent extending as far back as the Reformation with groups such as the 'Family of Love' finding supporters. The University of Cambridge played a considerable part in establishing Protestantism throughout the county especially after the foundation of Emmanuel and Sidney Sussex Colleges for the express purpose of supplying protestant preachers. Many graduates were appointed to livings around Cambridgeshire in spite of the activity of James I and Charles I to prevent them, and when Matthew Wren who was appointed Bishop of Ely in 1638 started introducing more Roman Catholic rituals, it really stirred up feeling. Many local people petitioned parliament to have him dismissed, as part of the lead up to the Civil War, by which time puritan ideals were well established.

Under the Commonwealth new ministers were appointed; in 1665 a graduate of Clare College, Francis Holcroft, was made Vicar of Bassingbourn and about the same Joseph Oddy from Trinity was appointed to Meldreth, whilst Willingham got Nathaniel Bradshaw, and James Day, an undergraduate at Emmanuel College, preached at Oakington. Holcroft felt it was his duty to preach in rural areas where evangelical preaching was unknown. He took his vocation very seriously and when he learned that the pulpit at Litlington was often empty on Sundays because the priest was suffering from the debauchery of the Saturday night, he volunteered to do the duties there too. While Vicar of Bassingbourn he was preaching two or three times in the week as well as on Sundays.

But after Cromwell's death, when Charles II was made King he cracked down on such activities, forcing clergy to sign a declaration of obedience – to only preach what he wanted preached. Thousands refused to conform and were ejected from their livings, including Holcroft and the others from Cambridge University. But they weren't going to stop sharing their convictions. Even after he'd been turned out from his pulpit Holcroft ministered to his congregation at Bassingbourn.

He might have been only a little man but he was a fanatical preacher. He travelled miles and miles on his chestnut nag to preach to his scattered flock and people journeyed to hear him from Abington, Eversden, Meldreth, Whaddon, Gamlingay and other villages in the area. Joseph Oddy became his chief assistant, even though he was a married man; some say he was unsettled in the head but he was a highly popular speaker, especially in the Fens, and many travelled 20 miles to hear him.

But as the congregation became larger it became increasingly difficult to find somewhere for them to meet so they decided to preach to them in separate bodies. There was a meeting at Great Eversden where four ministers were elected, Holcroft, Oddy, Corbyn and Bard and that meant Holcroft could travel even more, more gaining new converts all over the county. There is hardly a village in Cambridge but some odd person can show you the barn where Holcroft preached and he had particular success in villages on the edge of the fen, such as Quy, Soham, Needingworth and Wilbraham.

Other groups of dissenters developed in Cambridge where Mr Ekins was pastor and in many villages including Cottenham, Oakington, Histon, Waterbeach and Willingham where Nathaniel Bradshaw and James Day established Congregational discipline. Then when they moved on Joseph Oddy took over. The majority of the church members were from the lower classes. Bishop Laney, who'd been appointed Bishop of Ely in 1667, referred to them contemptuously as 'of ye common vulgar sort, scarce a yeoman amongst them' or 'most women'. He couldn't understand why such well-educated, even learned, men such as Holcroft and Oddy should scour the country forming churches of common folk – but he soon began to fear what they were preaching

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Pickwick had never previously been very interested in the spread of nonconformity during the distant days of King Charles II, but he listened intently as Peck imparted something of the knowledge he had picked up.

Fervent preacher Francis Holcroft had attracted large congregations back in the 1660s but the pro-Catholic authorities regarded such dissenters with a great deal of suspicion, believing their meetings to be seedbeds of revolution. In 1665 a Five Mile Act forbade any Nonconformist minister to live within five miles of any town or indeed any place where he had acted as minister and in 1670 this was followed by another Act which imposed penalties for attendance at worship not in the Anglican form.

Then the church cracked down: Holcroft was arrested while preaching at Great Eversden, his companion Joseph Oddy was detained at Meldreth along with Mr Corbyn and Mr Waite and another of their persuasion, Mr Bard only escaped by flight. When they came to trial Oddy was sentenced to five years imprisonment, and Holcroft was given the option of either leaving the country or suffering death as a felon. He was reprieved but remained in Cambridge Castle almost nine years.

Separated from his members it seemed an impossible task for Holcroft to keep his flock united, but adversity kept the congregation together and they organised their own services, enforcing a strict moral standard among themselves & impressing others with their 'saintliness'. From his prison cell Holcroft communicated with them by letter, one of which was published as 'A Word to the Saints from the Watch Tower'. Sometimes he was let out on parole and would ride at great risk to the Manor House at Eversden where one of his supporters lived. Behind the farm a wide path led to Eversden Wood and in the middle of the Wood stood a fine old oak, known as the 'Pulpit tree' under whose branches many people would gather secretly to hear Holcroft preach.

In 1672 Oddy and Holcroft were released from prison and allowed to preach under licences, but the local constables continued to persecute the meetings, fining those who absented themselves from the parish church. Mary Churchman became a convert to Holcroft's ministry but unfortunately her father was the local High Constable and was so furious that she was forced to hide herself in a wood stack as he passed by with a knife in his hand declaring he would kill her before he slept. To root out the dissenters constables relied on informers who were rewarded with a share of the heavy fines – and Joseph Oddy was forced to pay out some £6,000. Informing on dissenters' meetings became a lucrative occupation, and many informers falsified the evidence, until three of the most notorious offenders, Stephen Perry, a tinker, Edward Wallis,a cobbler and Christopher Herrod, a labourer were exposed as liars, and fined or imprisoned.

The meetings were also plagued by members of the University who regarded them as fair game. delighting in causing great disturbance as they came into the meeting place banging drums so that they could not hear what was preached.

In 1681 Holcroft was rearrested on the same charge as before, but as he was also deep in debt, the authorities let him out of Cambridge gaol so he could be imprisoned in the Fleet in London instead. Even there he continued to preach to the crowds outside, but his health worsened considerably until he was physically unable to preach even after his release. He died in 1692, five years after his co-minister Oddy. Both were buried alongside each other at Oakington, and this was the object of Peck's pilgrimage.

On arrival at the village it was an easy thing to locate the churchyard but no matter how hard they searched there was no sign of the graves. Nor did the vicar seem inclined to help them, he claimed he had no knowledge of such individuals & certainly there would be no resting-place for them in his graveyard. Then fortune favoured them, they spotted a young lady, a tranquil girl by the name of Warboys, who led them back to the churchyard once more. They crossed to a side gate and a country lane, but then she turned left and led them down a track beside a cottage garden. There amongst some bushes were the tombs they sought, forgotten memorials that had once attracted thousands of pilgrims. Now neglected they would soon disappear beneath the undergrowth – but were just the sort of thing to be reported to members of the Pickwick Club.

By the time Pickwick and Peck finally returned to the Castle Hotel it was very late but as all the events of the previous day churned through his mind Pickwick spent a somewhat restless night
As a consequence he awoke late to discover that all other members of the company had already breakfasted and gone about their business. He contemplated a gentle stroll around some of the colleges, but that was before he caught sight of the battered face of Robert Flynn – the constable whose life he had saved only the evening before, during that brutal battle in the Barnwell back streets.

There was one Cambridge building that few Cambridge folk chose to visit, one whose doors were barred more securely than the gate of Sidney Sussex College when the Master was in a temper. From Whyman on Castle Hill he had learned something of conditions at the County Gaol; a prostitute had told him the inside secrets of the Spinning House, the University's place of imprisonment, and his companions at the Wellington had spoken of the Town Gaol. Ever since Pickwick had experienced life in the Fleet, the notorious London prison, at first hand he had developed an interest in gaols – now Flynn offered him the opportunity to see another.

As they made there way towards the gaunt, castle-like structure across Parker's Piece, Flynn told him something of its story. The Cambridge town prison was not an ancient institution. A new gaol had been erected in 1790 just behind the old Spinning House but by 1819 people were complaining about its cleanliness, the lack of wholesome air and the poor state of repair. The criticisms were vindicated after one building containing two cells fell down. By 1823 there had been great agitation for a replacement and after much debate an Act of Parliament was obtained and the new gaol opened in 1828. It contained eight yards, eight day rooms and one small yard with a solitary cell but seldom accommodated more than 50 prisoners at one time

Although he knew his visit would be brief Pickwick still felt a shiver of apprehension as the strolled towards the battlemented gatehouse. Flynn rang the gate-bell, a small door opened and the gate-porter examined them suspiciously through a grating as he inquired the nature of their business. Flynn had his story ready: he needed to have a word with the chaplain regarding a forthcoming transfer of a prisoner to the hulks – an unlikely tale but it sufficed to open the way to the gate-lodge. There the janitor of the gate methodically entered their names in his book, noting the precise minute of their arrival as shown by his clock. In front of them glass-covered doors opened into the official portion of the building. On passing through them Pickwick found himself in a corridor with various offices on either side and at the very end of the passage a pair of iron gates leading into the prison proper.

Flynn spoke warmly to the warder who opened the gate allowing them entry into a large hall, on all sides of which were rows of cells. The overwhelming impression was of silence; there was scarcely a sound save an occasional slamming of doors or a rattle of iron gates. Here men, women and children were confined together be they debtors, awaiting trial, already sentenced to up to two years imprisonment or hardened criminals awaiting transportation or transfer to prisons elsewhere. Each door had space for a card containing information as to the stage to which the prisoner inside belonged and their conduct, for inside gaols there are good and badly behaved residents, just as there were outside. Each cell contained a plank-bed and, when occupied, bedclothes, towel and other oddments kept arranged in order.

But the gaol, though silent, was not empty. Pickwick could see men clothed in a drab suit of sombre appearance, scrubbing floors, brushing, dusting or making themselves generally useful. Work brought its reward – 2½ lbs [TWO AND A HALF POUNDS] of the best bread and a pint of table beer a day, with salt and water, but no other food, except on Saturday, when cheese and onions were allowed. Untried prisoners who did not work had just 1½ lbs [ONE AND A HALF POUNDS] of bread, but no beer, though they could supplement this

with whatever they could procure from their friends. The women got the same diet but with the addition of tea twice a day, and sometimes a little flour. “Formerly prisoners were allowed 3lbs [THREE POUNDS] of brown bread, but they prefer to have a bit less of the white – that’s perfectly sufficient, and convicts have left here after two years in better health than when they came in”, Flynn explained. But they would not get this just for brushing or dusting – there was proper work to be done in gaol, as Pickwick was to discover for himself.

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As Pickwick and Constable Flynn continued their tour of the Cambridge Town Gaol overlooking Parker’s Piece they entered a large, high room. It contained a structure like a huge wide waterwheel – but one whose paddles would never touch water. Immediately in front of it was what looked like a very high bookcase, with two shelves six feet apart. Except instead of books there were small wooden partitions – mini cells, but cells without doors. And in many of the cells stood prisoners, facing towards the wheel, their arms extended above their heads, grasping an iron bar. While they faced one way two prison officers sat facing the other, their backs to the convicts.

This was the tread wheel where prisoners ground the corn for the bread they ate. Forty men, in two rows of twenty, one above the other, would easily turn this heavy wheel by their combined effort. But today there were too few prisoners to occupy every partition; perhaps Pickwick might like to see for himself just what was involved.

Always ready for some new experience Pickwick selected an empty stall, stood for a moment or two to watch the man alongside him and to judge the speed of the ever-revolving wheel. Then, taking his courage in both hands, he raised his arms to grasp the bar above his head and stepped forward. He lifted his left foot to meet the revolving step, adding his power to that of the other human cogs. As that leg sank down so he lifted his right foot for the next. It was a strange sensation, taking his weight in part on his arms, in part on one foot and then the other. But he was soon accustomed to the routine, step up, step up, step up, step up, step up – a constant motion. It was not as easy as it had seemed, he was soon warm, soon perspiring, soon sweating freely as the wheel continued its constant turning.

He wondered how the prisoners managed, hour after hour in a mindless, repetitive plod; but all Pickwick had to do was to then step back on to the landing behind him. In fact any of the inmates had the same opportunity, though for them it would have resulted in the inconvenience of an interview with the governor and a somewhat drastic reduction in his daily diet.

In the interview or visiting room prisoners, at stated times, were allowed to see, but not to touch or even come near their friends. There were two sets of bars, parallel and separated some ten feet or so, at the far side of which the prisoner stood, the warder in the centre and the visitor at the further side, the official always between prisoner and guest to prevent stray contraband articles from being handed over. In some prisons, Flynn explained, there was also wire netting over the top of the room to prevent anything being thrown over by the visitor.

Then the tour continued to the chapel, where Pickwick was struck by the remarkable cheerfulness of the building, with its open benches for the prisoners and a governor’s pew reared aloft to command a good view of all the men. There was a much less pleasant room nearby, home to the prison cat – but one with nine tails – and various kinds of irons and a rod or two were kept. The cat had nine cords attached to it, without knots, the amount of physical pain resulting from the intimate union between the lashes and the prisoner’s back varying according to the skill with which it was handled. Flogging was a specialist skill and each gaol had at least one such specialist. In many prisons three dozen strokes was a very usual allowance in necessary cases and was often divided between three warders, each taking, or

rather giving, a dozen. A prisoner would be flogged in nearly all cases for an assault committed in prison, be it on a warder or fellow prisoner, or a flogging may have been imposed as part of the sentence, such as in cases of highway robbery with violence or garrotting. The cat was also used should a man undergoing a hard labour sentence start to become insubordinate. The birch rod was chiefly used on boys, but, Flynn confided, many men feared the birch more than the lash – they felt it more degrading. It was heroic to boast that they had been catted, but humiliating for it to be known they had been birched like a schoolboy.

There was a problem finding work for short-stay prisoners – but if you could get them to grind the flour for their bread and scrub the cells or landings, that would be as much as could be expected in such circumstances. But then, every part of a good prison should be kept scrupulously clean and if at the end of even a fortnight's sentence of hard labour a man did not know was "cleanliness" was, then he never would.

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Pickwick learned that some prisoners in Cambridge gaol were born malingerers; they would do almost anything to evade labour. One inmate refused to work and was given 24 lashes – but that was too light to have any beneficial effects; he persisted in his refusal for a fortnight until they threatened him with the Black Hole – that got him on to the tread mill! But one woman destroyed the oakum they'd given her to pick – and she was sent to the dark cell for six hours without dinner.

The most common trick was to pretend illness, the more tragic the better. Things such as epileptic seizures (which they induced by chewing a piece of soap producing a plausible foam effect), bleeding from the nose – generated by forcing splinters of wood up their nostrils, spitting blood and so on; anything to stave off the dreaded tread-wheel.

When a prisoner had a genuine illness there was one man he could turn to – the surgeon. But a couple of years earlier there had been an outcry when Mr A.S. Abbott, who'd held the post of surgeon at the gaol for some 17 years had been summarily dismissed at two days notice by a small group of magistrates. They'd got it into their heads that his salary was too high – it was £50, compared to the £60 paid for the surgeon at the county gaol on Castle Hill. They'd argued that he only had on average 47 prisoners as compared to 126 in the county; but others felt sure that Mr Abbott's only fault was his politics. He'd carried on but in March this year, 1838, the salary had come up again. Two other doctors said they'd do the work for £20 a year, and given the problems over funding the gaol some councillors said it seemed wrong to spend more than they had to. Once more the debate had raged and they'd finally decided to offer him £30; perhaps that was fair, seeing as the number of prisoners in the gaol had dropped down to about 25. The daft thing was that Cambridge men being convicted by the courts were being sent up to the County Gaol on Castle Hill – and the Town was having to pay £53 a year for them. Now the council was talking about getting a change in the rules – town criminals should go to the town gaol, it would be cheaper

The surgeon had a variety of problems to attend to: one prisoner refused to take his monthly bath – he held out for a week and used the most extraordinary imprecations when the surgeon said he saw no reason to excuse him from the bath. Many prisoners left gaol in a far better condition than they'd been in when they got there – sometimes with fatal results. There was one old man, 68 years of age who was in excellent health and been discharged in good spirits. But soon afterwards he was found dead on the common, abut a quarter of a mile away. The inquest showed that a large blood vessel in his heart had ruptured, causing instant death. They reckoned that he'd been so excited to get out of gaol that he'd walked too fast and the excitement and feeling of liberty had been his undoing – that and him having immediately on discharge drank both gin and beer in liberal qualities!

And it wasn't just the male prisoners who were the problem. One boy was placed in refractory cell on a punishment diet for 24 hours for swearing and making use of obscene language to the turnkeys – and the child was only 10 years old, having given himself up to every vice. Another lad had been locked up without his dinner for getting into a clean bed with his dirty shoes and trousers on!

The Governor tried to do the best he could to make life bearable, but his main job was to ensure security and prevent inmates escaping. It's the man under a sentence of ten or fifteen years who will do anything to regain his freedom, otherwise its not worth the risk. If they suspect a convict is planning to escape they make him put his clothes outside his cell every night – an ingenious precaution, especially in winter when the gaol can be so cold that even in bed, fully clothed, you can't stop your teeth chattering. One February it had been so bad that the Governor had even allowed the convicted prisoners to have fires in the day room and to take their meals together.

You might think that the top of a prison would be the safest place in which to lodge a 'long sentence' or desperate man. Not so. They put them on the ground floor so that the night watchman could locate any sounds coming from the cell. Even so some do get out – not so long ago a man broke out of his cell and made his way towards the main gate, hugging the wall to keep in the shadows. But the turnkey had spotted him, raised his musket and threatened to shoot – oh yes they were armed as a matter of course, they were dealing with dangerous people in the Parker's Piece gaol

[source: G.R. Vicars. In a country prison. English illustrated magazine. 1892-3]

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Pickwick was happy to escape the grim confines of the Cambridge Town Gaol and stroll back in the calm of an August afternoon towards the Castle Hotel in St Andrew's Street. But there was another building en route which had caught his eye and now he had time he elected to explore.

The University Arms Hotel and posting-house had been erected just four years earlier & was certainly an important addition to the Cambridge scene. Situated on the edge of Parker's Piece, next to the grounds of Emmanuel and just across the road from the new Downing College it offered everything the discerning nobility and gentry could require. A square three-storey building with 15 bedrooms and assorted dining and function rooms, every window commanded extensive views, unlike the other hotels in Cambridge, which were hemmed in by other buildings. And this was a Family Hotel – not for them the chore of catering for the masses who arrived by stagecoach, they were aiming at guests with their own carriages. It had been built by a property developer, Joseph Berry, on the site of the old Greyhound Inn, but he had no particular interest in its management and had appointed William Bird as licensee.

Bird was an experienced host; he had run the Sun Inn on Peas Hill between 1823 and 1825 and then moved to the famous Hoop in Bridge Street – one-time home to Jemmy Gordon. One way to ensure success for a hotel in Cambridge was to cater for the political market. Being convenient for the elections on Parker's Piece the University Arms had already gained a reputation for its catering by organising a dinner for the two successful Conservative candidates at the 1835 election. Despite short notice he had erected a commodious booth on his bowling green and served up a handsome and successful repast to over 100 people.

All in all everything ought to be guaranteed for a successful venture. But while the hotel might thrive things had gone wrong for the manager. Bird had got himself into debt to a wine merchant and earlier that year had been declared bankrupt. Now there was a new man at the

helm, John Barefoot, who had been landlord of the old Greyhound. But he was 76 years old, and far too advanced in age to move from his comfortable New Square house into the turmoil of a family hotel, having to bow and scrape and ensure that well-heeled guests had everything they could desire.

Taking his ease in one of the large rooms overlooking Parker's Piece Pickwick indulged himself by paying a somewhat excessive price for a glass of red wine and, as was his wont, was soon chatting to a perfect stranger. This was a young obviously refined young man, Solomon Secundus, who was putting the final stanzas to his latest poetical effusion, reflections on the social side of Cambridge life that the had experienced first hand. And it took only a very little prompting to get him to recite to his obviously appreciative audience. Clearing his throat he commenced:

Old Granta may boast this the Cradle of learning
Of Poets, and Painters and Priests most discerning;
Of Students called Jarveys with four-in-hand driving
And in every Science are happily thriving.

Of late as by chance passing through this fam'd Town
I gap'd as I wander'd the Streets up and down.
Fatigu'd and bedraggled I at last had my full
So I hastened to Inn at the Sign of the Bull.

As I enter'd the Yard I was met at the door
By some high-scented Beaux nay more than a score
And the fiddles struck up which set them a prancing
So I though to myself Why sure that means dancing.

I then rang for the Waiter and soon I found out
'Twas a Ball by Subscription, a sort of a Rout
The particulars of which to me soon he told
And if you'l have patience the same I'll unfold.

And as Secundus – if that indeed was his name – began to describe the scene and name the names of those fashionable youths of Cambridge who were besporting themselves so Pickwick was transported into a world he had never before glimpsed.

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The Bull Hotel was in the heart of University Cambridge, between Kings and St Catharine's colleges, but its Ball attracted people from every class and area, as Solomon Secundus's stanzas made clear.

In his rhyme he described how he had joined the dance:

Two Stewards so gay were arrang'd at the head
One quite a Prime Twigg call'd G. Gotobed.
The other James Favell, he's a Painter I'm told,
Yet he look'd like a Rolla his manners were bold.

At nine they set to in their Silks and their Laces
The Beaux and the Belles in their very best graces.
Oh how the room sparkled with Tapers so bright
And the bosom of each throb'd high with delight.

The fiddlers fresh rosin'd they stood up for the dance
To the time of Tekali, oh how they did prance,
And young Gotobed the Steward, a dashing young spark
First led off with Miss Curtis, as live as a lark

"Have a care" loud he cried, "Come Music play higher"
"Hark to 'em" rejoined Tom Mellish Esquire.
"Less noise loud and Thunder" Jem Favell then cried
For he the Factorum o'er the whole did provide.

Baff Mills from the Lion arriv'd in a Chaise
Escorting Miss Hignell they shone in a blaize.
And next came Gom Headley, a dealer in Grains
With the lovely Miss Stewart who to please took great pains.

And next Taylor Ned cut his capers so pretty
So striving to please and so monstrous witty.
The Ladies e'en laugh'd whenever he spoke
As he tripp'd down the dance or cracked the Sharp joke.

Young Baronet Swann next his form did display
With the charming Miss Hazzards more lovely than May.
Sam Weldon the Butcher full of Slaughter and Fury
Came in with Miss Favell, a Nymph from the Cury.

Young Newby he brought a Miss Sparkes to this Ball
If I may judge by the sample 'twas a kind of short small,
And young Symetry Coe cut a very great show
With the lovely Miss Whitehead from the Bear in the Row

Then in came young Brewster, a dashing gay Blade
With another Miss Hignell from All Saints (a Maid).
Young Goode soon arriv'd too both lightsome and airy
And so did Miss Smith who look'd like a Fairy

The next that appeared was a young student the Glover
And the youngest Miss Hignell who sighed for a lover
A wonderful Bird on the earth Miss Swann did appear
With Rickard from Bab'ram, a village quite near.

Bill Mitchell who in dancing had never his fill
Led forward Miss Gurford who lives on the Hill
He looked like a Lion, I mean one that's Red
And She like a Spirit, a live one not dead.

Tom Edlestone arriv'd too in apparel black jet
And the little Miss Goode with her pair la brunette.
Tom Mitchell too strutted and look'd very big
He escorted Miss Wallis as spruce as a fig.

Red and White Negus in large bowls did appear
And Coffee besides you know that's not dear.
I applauded their Frolick by prudence attended
And by relating I've no one offended.

The Beaux all alert and the Belles all alive
They danc'd till the Clock at St Mary's told Five
Then off home they caper'd the Bells with their Beaux
And I jump'd into Bed and dropped into a snoze.

'Twas Ten by my watch e'er from Bed I did Crawl
To Breakfast of Tea and a hot College Roll
Then on a Sheet of white Paper this description I drew
My reckoning I settled and bade Cambridge adieu –

Or at least that's what I intended,
Before I met you – the young man added

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Pickwick's young companion proved a fund of delight and, flattered by the attention of such a prominent personage, Solomon Secundus was soon reciting certain other of his poems. One such was the remarkable story of a ghost, a Cambridge scholar and a piece of mutton.

In the days which are past, by the banks of a stream
Whose waters but softly were flowing,
With ivy o'ergrown, an old mansion-house stood,
That was built on the skirts of a chilling damp wood,
Where the yew-tree and cypress were growing.

The villagers shook as they pass'd by the doors,
When they rested at eve from their labours;
And the traveller many a furlong went round,
If his ears once admitted the terrific sound
Of the tale that was told by the neighbours.

They said that the house on the skirts of the wood
By a saucer-ey'd Ghost was infested,
Who fill'd every heart with confusion and fright,
By assuming strange shapes in the dead of the night,
Shapes monstrous, and foul, and detested.

And truly they said, and the Master well knew
That the Ghost was the greatest of evils;
For no sooner the bell of the Mansion told one,
Than the frolicksome Imp in a fury began
To caper like ten thousand devils.

The Scholar was vers'd in all magical arts,
Most famous was he throughout College:
To the Red Sea full many an unquiet Ghost,
To repose with King Pharaoh and his mighty host.
He had sent through his powerful knowledge.

To this Scholar so learned, the Master he went,
And as lowly he bent with submission,
Told the freaks of the Ghost, and the horrible frights
That prevented his household from resting o'nights,
And offered this humble petition:-

“That he, the said Scholar, in wisdom so wise,
“Would the mischievous fiend lay in fetters;
“Then send him in torments for ever to dwell,
“To the nethermost pit of the nethermost Hell,
“For destroying the sleep of his betters.”

The Scholar so vers'd in all mystical lore,
Told the Master his pray'r should be granted;
Then order'd his horse to be saddled with speed,
And perch'd on the back of the cream-colour'd steed,
Trotted off to the house that was haunted.

He enter'd the doors at the fall o' the night-
The trees of the forest 'gan shiver;
The hoarse raven croak’d, and blue burnt the light,
The owl loudly shriek’d, and pale with affright
The servants like aspins did quiver.

“Bring some turnips and milk!” the Scholar he cry'd,
In a voice like the echoing thunder:-
They brought him some turnips, and suet beside,
Some milk, and a spoon, and his motions they ey'd,
Quite lost in conjecture and wonder.

He mash'd up the turnips with butter and milk;-
The hail at the casements 'gan clatter;
The lightnings blue flash'd, and with terrific din
The wind at each crevice and cranny came in,
As he call for a small wooden platter.

He mash'd up the turnips with nutmeg and spice,
The mess would have ravish'd a glutton;
When lo! his sharp bones hardly cover'd with skin,
The Ghost from a nook o'er the window peep'd in,
In the form of a boil’d scragg of mutton

“Ho! Ho!” said the Ghost, “what art doing below?”
The Scholar look'd up in a twinkling-
“The times are too bad to afford any meat,
“So to render my turnips more pleasant to eat,
“A few grains of pepper I'm sprinkling.”

Then he caught up a fork, and the Mutton he seiz’d,
And sous'd it at once in the platter;
Threw o'er it some salt and a spoonful of fat,
And before the poor Ghost could tell what he was at,
He was gone! - like a mouse down the throat of a cat
And this is the whole of the matter.

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Solomon Secundus had come to Cambridge seeking to find somebody who might publish his poetry and, thanks to the information imparted by Roe the printseller, Pickwick was able to suggest just the man, the Dean of Caius, who was even then serialising his ‘Cambridge

Portfolio'. Perhaps there might still be space for the extra poem, especially if it were once that might appeal to those with a smattering of Cambridge history.

Solomon had just the thing; it related to a real character – indeed Pickwick had heard something of his story from Nahum Noggins in the Puckeridge churchyard.

Richard Vaughan had been the legendary stagecoach driver, whose fame with the whip was still talked of, despite his fatal accident a decade or more before. Dick could drive a coach like nobody else and had endeared himself to generations of university gentlemen as they made their way to college on the Cambridge Telegraph. He had conveyed princes and prisoners bound for the hulks, nonconformists and catholics neither of whom could attend University – it was for Church of England only – and once, so it was said, Dick had driven the Devil himself and to compound the sin had done so on the Sabbath.

Henry took another sip, cleared his throat and began to recite 'Phaeton Diabolbletos'

Dick Neck-or-nought sat in the White Horse tap.
And a mournful man was he,
That he was prevented by woeful hap
From driving his good Tele

For Vice-Chancellor brave, Heads of Houses grave,
Did so in their wisdom ordain,
That no Coach should go down on a Sunday to town
Or on Sunday come back again.

O then spake out Dick Neck-or-nought stout,
And a terrible oath sware he -
"Now if next Sunday I fail to drive-
By the Kirk of Sayncte Marie-

At the Hour of three my good Tele,
Then never again may I drive
But ev'n let Old Nick mount the coach-box of Dick,
As sarten as I'm alive!"

"That's Great St Mary's church", Solomon added needlessly.

O blythely arose the Sunday morn;
And blythe rose the Neck-or-nought gay,
And gaily, I wot, did himself adorn,
To Cambridge to drive that day.

With his hosen so tight, and his castor so white,
And his caxon in tippy curl;
His bengee coat was a varmint stout,
Y'buttoned with mother of pearl.

This confirmed what Nahum had said, for Dick was indeed a man of the utmost fashion as his portrait by Dighton confirmed.

And merrily up to the box he sprang,
As Saynct Dunstan's clock struck nine:
“Ya hip, my hearties!”, he cheerly sang,
“In Cambridge I mean to dine”

But never a passenger, out nor in,
Could jolly Dick Neck-or-nought find,
Save a sallow-faced gentleman, tall and thin,
Who rode in the dicky behind.

And fast did they fly merry Iseldon by,
And by Tottenham flew they fast,
And by Edmonton gay, and by Waltham Abbey,
And that auncient rood they past.

But never a word spake that passenger brown,
But a long pipe smoked he,
Which lasted him even to Ware from town,
Smelling right sulphurouslie.

But when as they got to Ware, well I wot,
And stopped awhile at the Inn,
Then that passenger brown laid his long pipe down,
And call'd for a glass of gin.

O then might ye see a wonderful sight
For, as he was drinking his gin,
All over the glass play'd a flame so bright,
Without his mouth and within.

But small heed gave the Neck-nor-nought brave,
As he sprang to the box with glee,
And the dash of the heels and the clash of the wheels
Told far of his good Tele.

And fast did they fly merry Wadesmill by,
And by Puckeridge fast they flew,
Nor rest did they until merry Barkway
They speedily came unto.

And when as they came to merry Barkway,
There an heap of stones appear'd;
But into the heap went the Neck-or-nought gay,
Nor aught for his Tele he fear'd.

O wight too rash! for an horrible crash,
As over the stones went he,
Gave thundering token that something was broken;
Alas! 'twas an axle-tree!

But soon at Barkway did a conynge wheelwright
Find a gay new axle-tree;
Yet a good half hour had sped its flight
Ere off went the good Tele.

(And all the while did that gentleman smile
Who rode in the dicky behind.
Yet why he should grin at the coach breaking in,
Could never Dick Neck-or-nought find.)
But a crack of the whip made the leaders to skip,
And fast they went clattering on,
Till soon in view of the town they drew
Of auncient Trumpington.

O then in what stowre Dick looked at that towre
O what can the Neck-or-nought see?
The moon? -or a cloud? or a coffin? -or a shroud? -
Or a fiend,-or a party at tea?

Tis none of these that Neck-or-nought sees,
On Trumpington's auncient towre;
But the clock's minute hand doth at sixty stand,
And at three is the hand of the hour.

And four for the quarters, and three for the hour
Rang over wood and plain,
Then loudly 'gan rave the Neck-or-nough brave
And flogged his horses amain.

Then first spake up from the dicky behind
That gentleman tall and thin;
“Sir Neck.-or-nought, if ye be so inclin'd,
I myself will drive you in.”

Then a glad man, I wet, was that bold Neck-or-nought;
“Ye may drive and be welcome,” said he;
I reck not a bit, Sir, what comes o'the tits, Sir,
Now 1 cannot be in by three.”

And that gentleman grim of the whip bath ta’en hold,
And tight hath he grasp'd the rein;
“Saynct Fyakere speed thee, thou Neck-or-nought bold,
Thou never shall drive again!”

Like a serpent's trail shew'd his coat's long tail,
His eyen like bonfires burn’d,
And his Wellington boot to an horny foot,
With a cleft in the middle was turn’d.

His red nose blaz'd on his black phyz rais'd,
From his mouth came a flame all red,
As thus to the Neck-or-nought, sorely amaz'd,
He thunder'd in words of dread:

“Well hast thou vow'd, thou Neck-or-nought proud
And as thou hast vow'd it shall be!
So since thou hast failed this day to drive
By the Kirke of Saynct Marie,

At the hour of three, thy good Tele,

Now never again shalt thou drive;
For now is Old Nick on the coach box of Dick,
As sarten as thou'rt alive!”

And fast into air then vanish'd the pair,
And vanish'd the Tele, I ween,
And never again were that ghastly twain,
And that wondrous Tele seen.
Yet still on the road of Trumpington broad,
Though nought may the traveller see;
The dashing of heels and the clashing of wheels
Tell far of that good Tele.

Full oft on that road hath the Freshman stood,
That wondrous noise to hear,
And deem'd that the Lynn, or the Fly coming in,
Rang rattling on his ear.

And oft hath he gone to the one-mile stone,
At night when Proctoures raunge,
And left the page of Euclid sage,
To list to that rattling straunge.

And still must resound that wonderful sound,
While Trumpington road survives;
For, by proverb of old, whilome it was told -
Needs must when the Devil drives.

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Pickwick was enjoying himself at the University Arms Hotel, reclining in a comfortable armchair, listening to Solomon’s stanzas and enjoying a few delicacies supplied by the management, who had learned of the fame of their new visitor. But these delicacies were to prove less than delicious, for suddenly Pickwick bit down into something hard and experienced an intense pain from one of his remaining teeth

His discomfiture was immediately noticed by one of the hotel staff, a hawk-eyed Scotsman named Smith, who hastened to his side and was quick to offer advice. There were a number of barbers who would extract the damaged molar, and several chemists could also offer the service– in fact it was becoming a lucrative addition to their normal service. One of their regular guests was a country chemist who charged just 1/- for extracting teeth and had made £200 in one year – 4000 teeth in all. Of course if Pickwick cared to visit the Stourbridge Fair he would fine a plethora of dentists ready to extract teeth – all he needed to do was to head towards the booths which made the loudest, most raucous music – necessary to drown the screams of the patients.

But if he wanted a proper dentist then there were two to chose from. Mr James Tweedy, a student of Guy’s Hospital had premises in All Saints Passage, but whether he had actually qualified as a surgeon, or had taken up dentistry after he failed his exams no-one was sure.

The more established dentist was John Jones who had set up in premises in Jesus Lane back in 1828, having visited the town for several years before that. Many of the better class Cambridge folk were now his customers, they attested that he scaled and cleaned teeth with the greatest delicacy, rendering them beautifully white. He could set natural and artificial

teeth, from one to a complete set, not to be distinguished from nature and fill hollow teeth to prevent toothache or decay.

Not for him some of the less salubrious dental practices. None of this business of extracting a tooth from a chimney sweep and transplanting it into the mouth his patient. Jones did not – unlike some – have a number of transplantees lined up in case the first tooth to be tried did not fit, nor did he patronise those firms who arranged for battlefields to be raided for teeth suitable for transplantation.

A trip to the dentist was not something to be looked forward to, though Smith knew several young ladies of quality who visited, not strictly for medical reasons. More and more people were becoming conscious of their appearance, and several ladies had confided that they attributed the acquisition of a rich husband to the attraction of their beautiful set of teeth. Such surgery would certainly benefit one young lady, Mrs Buckner, about 25, who would be very pretty if her teeth were not black as ink. And the improvements to another, who had her horrid black teeth filed down and two new false ones put in was remarkable – only the silly ass must have dressed like a lady and not a cook because Mr Jones charged her 50/-. He would, it was said moderate his charges sometimes, and it was best not to have the right money, because one woman had saved herself a shilling out of a two guinea bill as she hadn't got the cash on her.

Mind you it was the quality of the work that mattered – and Jones was good, and a quick operator – he could take a wax model of your gums and have a new set of teeth ready in four days. For this he'd charge 25 guineas, one year's wage for an agricultural labourer. But as he pointed out a large part of the cost was the gold, which he took directly from sovereigns.

It was amazing Jones had stayed in Cambridge after what had happened to him near Christmas five years ago. He'd been disturbed by the noise of breaking glass and found the fanlight over the door had been smashed. Two completely drunk undergraduates had been throwing stones to extinguish a lamp and accidentally smashed the fanlight. This was a well known 'lark' but Jones was not prepared to put this down to sheer high spirits. He'd remonstrated with one of the students who promptly called him everything under the sun – so Jones had knocked his cap off and slammed the door in his face. But then the students began to pelt the upstairs windows with stones, breaking seven or eight panes. Jones and his wife took chase down the street and insisted on knowing their names and college. They refused point-blank so Jones seized the grad's cap, so he could report him to the proctors. The student made a grab for it back – and Jones passed it to his wife, who was then attacked, her gown being ripped. Jones knocked one student and they ran off singing, only to return half an hour later with a heavy instrument ready to wreak their revenge. But by this time the noise had raised several witnesses and the bulldogs, who enforced student discipline, were on the scene.

The young men were disciplined by the University authorities, one was suspended and the other reprimanded – and it's fair to assume that the next time either of them had a toothache he found his way to a back-street dentist, and made sure he stayed out of Jones' chair!

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Pickwick was lingering in the comfort of the University Arms, reluctant to take the first step in a progress that would take him to the dentist's chair. He sought for any form of distraction and found it in abundance in the form an elderly, obviously wealthy gentleman who was holding court on a subject about which he was obviously expert – servants.
"You must learn to manage your staff", he was advising a much younger man, apparently his grandson. "Things were different when I was setting up. Do you remember Thomas Hemsted

… no he was before your time; I hired him as Coachman and to do carting and gardening. I gave him a complete livery and told him he'd get a new frock suit with leather britches and a hat and boots every year. I offered him £8 a year, with a free wash – and they was good terms then, in 1766. But he left after four weeks. So I took on James Webb in his place; seven shillings a week, but he'd to find his own clothes – the old one's didn't fit him and I couldn't afford another set – and his own food and lodgings – and he stayed just a fortnight.

"Then I hired William Child to be Coachman or postilion, should we have to take the box of the chariot down or otherwise, and do all sorts of farming business, ploughing, dung-carting and so on. I brought the money up to 11 guineas provided he supplied his own clothes – but I'd give him a jacket, pair of boots and a hat to drive in together with a complete livery for Sunday driving out. So then I was settled for a coachman

"I needed some footmen so I hired John Bowes at £5 per year wages together with another £2 instead of victuals. He came into service 16th September and left two weeks later. Then the Rev Mr Robinson of Hammerton in Huntingdonshire recommended Thomas Chester who'd been with him for eight years as footman, gardener, and horsekeeper. So I took him on as footman and do odd jobs and a bit in the garden, at the rate of £7 a year without food, but said that if my wife ever did come home he could have £5 and all he could eat. Well I'd got that frock suit, and breeches so he could wear them as well. We shook hands on it, I gave him a mug of ale as earnest but I had to dismiss him for misbehaviour after six months".

It seemed obvious that the old man had been in those days just setting himself up in his mansion, apparently somewhere in the area of Little Shelford. He'd engaged a number of lads, one named Robert as a boy servant, with another, Godwin, to look after horses. Miles Carpenter had been offered 25/- a year to take care of the cows and hogs while John Hagger (son of Samual Hagger, the wheelwright), was taken on as a ploughman and horsekeeper, along with Robert Andrews from Trumpington as man servant, horse keeper and ploughman. He'd needed female staff too, Molly as under-maid, to milk cows, feed the hogs, poultry, and to do all sorts of work and Judith as cook. But for some reason none had stayed very long.

Once settled and accepted in society the family had been invited to Abington to dine with Mr Pierson. It had been a pleasant evening and their hosts gathered at the front door with numerous family, friends and servants to see them off. All were aboard the coach, except the head of the house himself, as the old man recalled: "My servant Stephen Tooke, who had the care of my great coat, was wanting, and I had to have my coat to put on before I got into the coach. After much calling and bawling for Stephen and my great coat at length he came out of the house at the front door behind us all, and when I reprimanded him for his absence so long, he was so insolently saucy that I was compelled to give him a box on the ear, on which he was ten times more saucy and would have the last word. I couldn't take this from a servant – not in front of all those people - so I struck him a blow on the back with my daughter's light little whip. And would you believe he attacked me with his force and might in a most vengeful and awful way and struck me upon the head with a large cane stick. Mr. Pierson, and his sons and his two tutors and servants had to interfere and separate us, pulling him down to the ground, or we might have destroyed one or both of us.

"In the mean time, during this battle, my daughter and her three companion ladies, all in my coach were all frightened out of their wits. My daughter Mary – your mother – was in hysterics, and her companions all screeching for fear had to carried out of the coach and waited an hour back in the house again before they could recover their fright". It had been a most shaken family that had made the journey home from Abington and Pickwick wondered whether conditions below stairs in that particular household had ever improved.

The buzz of conversation in the University Arms hotel restarted as the elderly gentleman who had been inadvertently catching the ear and attention of all those people scattered throughout the various armchairs left the room with an erect, gait

His youthful companion glanced up, caught Pickwick's eye, and smiled. Then, rising he came over: "You must forgive the General – as you can gather he was more better at commanding soldiers than servants in his younger days, but he is a remarkable man". The Reverend Henry Wale, for so he introduced himself, joined Pickwick and Solomon. "He is a hoarder, his home a mass of paper, receipts, recipes, journals of his journeys, newspaper cuttings. Why only this morning I was browsing through his library – where incidentally I discovered a copy of your own publication – for you are the author of the Pickwick Papers?" At this the buzz of conversation dried up once more, and Pickwick was aware of a sea of faces now turned in his direction, not least that of the youthful Solomon who now viewed him in a new light.

Seeing his embarrassment Wale continued: "And there as a book marker was this snippet from the Cambridge Chronicle from December 1798 - some 40 years ago now". Here he produced a piece of faded newspaper, smoothed it out and passed it over. It read: *'Six o'clock in the morning of Friday last, the south west angle, with the buttresses and side walls adjoining, of the lofty and venerable tower of Great Shelford Church, fell to the ground. It was built together with the church, about 400 years ago, at the sole cost of Thomas Patesle, rector, who lies buried in the chancel with his effigies of brass upon the tombstone. In the beginning of the present century the tower suffered very much from a violent storm, which threw down a spire of 45 feet in height from its top and split the side walls in various directions. The damage was in part judiciously repaired at the time by a crown work of stone on the top, but the lower part of the tower being neglected to be cramped round and secured from giving way, the fissures increased from the pressure of the superincumbent weight, aided by the effects of the weather, and had for some years presented to the beholders' view a stupendous mass of disjointed materials awfully awaiting their inevitable doom. The inhabitants were warned of its approach by a gradual diminution of strength, and the buttresses of the south west angle had withdrawn from their bearings, and with the whole angle had lately made an alarming settlement, and within the last week some cart loads of stone and mortar fell from the south wall into the church yard. At length one half of the tower, to the height of 80 feet, together with the five bells, fell down, and happily without doing any damage to the body of the church or any single individual in the parish'*

Such a terrible destruction to their parish church had shocked the Shelford residents, but they had rallied round, collected funds and rebuilt the damaged tower, but to a different design, Wale explained, and continued: "My grandfather – Thomas Wale's study – is overflowing with such snippets as this. Indeed the old house is full of cupboards. In the walls, behind the chimneys, on the landing, under the stairs, round the corners, wherever you place your hands and feet – the very cellars are alive with cupboards. There is one room with thirteen cupboards – one for each of his twelve children, and one dedicated to odds and ends. They are a marvel of neatness, from the eldest girls' frocks, carefully folded up, to number eleven which contains my father's first pair of breeches.

Some of the cupboards have been nailed up for years, others are covered over with paper, but there's one in particular which has always held a particular fascination for me. It's on the right-hand side facing you as you enter the butler's pantry. I'm sure that no mortal eye on earth has ever penetrated the secrets of that cupboard. No one knows where it goes, it seems right behind the dining-room fireplace. Miles of brown paper have been pasted over it from time to time, but all in vain; it is an iron cupboard and always shows itself, always seeming to say, I am an iron cupboard. And of, the hollow sound it gives when you tap on it with your knuckles. What can that cupboard contain? No one knows. Some say gold, bright glittering

gold. Others port wine, or a lady bricked up 'frail as she was fair', but all is mystery and conjecture."

But there was an even greater treasure house to be explored – which is what had brought him home to Shelford. "Facing the study, on the opposite side of the high road, in the corner of a grass field called the Camping Close (originally Champion Close, as the village sports were held there), inclosed in a wooden fence, stands the family mausoleum, and here from time to time have been gathered together the mortal remains of my ancestors". And it was this that he had been asked to investigate. .

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The Rev Henry Wale recalled how, on the death of his father it had been decided that the family mausoleum be opened and a general muster of his ancestors made in a new vault under the family pew in the parish church. "You can imagine my feelings as the door swung on its hinges and, entering, I stood surrounded by my ancestors. I can assure you it was a very strange and solemn feeling, and at first I could hardly breathe, much less speak.

"On looking around me the first thought that struck me was, 'What a number of coffins!, and look at those little ones tucked in every here and there'. On examining them I was surprised to find the various conditions they were in; some so well preserved they seemed as fresh as when first placed there, others I could see at once we should move with difficulty. Some of the black cloth that covered them was sound and good, whilst the others I could pinch it off with finger and thumb…"

It was obvious he would have gone on in great detail to explain the problems they had faced, but was interrupted by the return of his elderly General grandfather. He was accompanied by a young man of some 19 years of age, one who had just acquired a great fortune in most extraordinary circumstances. He gave his name as Robert Taylor and was soon regaling them with his tale.

"I am the son of the late Lord Kennedy, who married my mother twelve months after my birth. My mother dying when I was but young my father ordered me to be put out to nurse with a woman named Robinson, in the City Road, London, who received £100 a year and £1 a week to take care of me.

"But when I was seven years old I was stolen by some gipsies who left me at Bilston, near Wolverhampton, where a collier picked me up and employed me in the pits there. It happened in the mean time that Lord Kennedy died and, having no lawful issue, he bequeathed the greater portion of his estate to me, his lost son. Inquiries were made in all directions to try and find me, and advertisements inserted in all the leading journals – but of this of course I knew nothing. Just at this time I was taken ill at Bilston and was attending a surgeon daily for his prescription. The surgeon having seen the advertisement recognised me from these strange marks on my arms" – and here he stripped off his lace-lined coat and rolled up his silken sleeve to reveal some most distinctive birth-marks. "He wrote to the advertising parties in London and Mrs Robinson travelled up to Birmingham where she recognised me as the lost heir

"Thus I was placed in a situation of affluence and wealth but soon I tired of it and, taking a large sum of money I returned to Bilston and my colliery friends where I spent it in dissipation and debauchery. In this situation an angel of the Temperance Society crossed my path and I became a 'teetotaller' and started again for London in good style where I placed myself once more under the care of Mrs Robinson and lived with her for three years. But then I started to get restless once more and resolved to leave.

"One of the eccentricities of my father's will, was that I was bound to live with Mrs Robinson until I attained the age of 21 years, or until I got married. So I advertised for a wife. Amongst

the replies I received was one from Birmingham and there I returned last week to see the young lady concerned. I was instantly struck by her beauty and charm and fixed last Saturday for the marriage – but she wished to wait until Monday. So I inquired for another girl and was introduced to Mary Ann Skidmore, who was fetched out of Mr Barn's factory in Newhall Street to see me on Friday, and on Saturday morning we were married by license at St Philip's church. She is a good-looking girl, the daughter of poor but honest parents in Edmund Street, and has a good testimonial from her employer. She's not as old as me, but we love each other dearly and are both looking forward to my 21st birthday, in two years time, when I will come into the enormous sum of £60,000 a year. We arrived here just the other day and have booked the very best room, but sadly she is unwell and we must return back to Birmingham. The only problem is that I have lost my wallet – I had it when I went into the Wrestler's Inn in the Petty Cury where a kind gentleman warned me about pickpockets – and now cannot afford the price of a stagecoach ticket. It is a dashed impertinence, but I wonder if any of you gentlemen could help me out with a guinea – I will of course repay you as soon as my funds are realised …"
But the lad's Great Expectations were to be dashed as far as Pickwick and his company were concerned – for they had read of the affair in the Cambridge newspaper and believed not a word of it.

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The Rev Walker was shocked that they had been approached in such an audacious manner in the sitting room of a hotel such as the University Arms – but that was typical of the way the world was changing. You could not trust anybody these days – not even the postman!

As he explained, A daily post between Cambridge & London had been established for nearly 100 years, with bags despatched from the G.P.O. London every night and a return post every day, except Sundays. Once the mail coaches had been introduced the letters for Cambridge were dropped of at Bournbridge by the London and Norwich coaches when they changed horses. As they left London at 8pm and Norwich at 6pm they both arrived at the same time, about ten to two in the morning. The Cambridge postmaster had to get the mail down to Bournbridge in time to meet the coaches and this meant the post left Cambridge at 9 p.m. every night except Saturday, and was in every morning, except Monday, at 9 a.m. Then as the coaches got quicker the time for collection got later and delivery earlier.

To keep to time the mail coaches had to dash along at 10 miles an hour, all through the night, and they had to be brilliantly lit so the driver could see the road. But this half-blinded other road users and the thunder of their approach woke up people in the villages they passed through. Then when regulations were brought in forbidding all four horses from galloping at the same time, the mail-contractors found they couldn't maintain the speed to fulfil their contracts. So they invested in a number of exceptionally fast trotters, for which they paid high prices, so they could have one in every team.

The Vice Chancellor of Cambridge University, the Heads of the colleges, the Mayor, Alderman and others petitioned for a direct delivery between Cambridge and London and in 1805 we finally got the London to Wisbech mail coach, via Chatteris and St Ives, which called at the Sun Inn, Cambridge, and completed the journey in 7¼ [SEVEN AND A QUARTER] hours. But there were problems maintaining an efficient service up to Wisbech. They tried a new mail coach going three times a week to Wisbech and four times to Kings Lynn, but the losses were so large that in 1822 the mail coach was discontinued and they went back to carrying the mail by an armed horseman.

Since Thomas Hobson's time the University have had their own letter carriers for their correspondence, but only members of the colleges are allowed to use this service. They did't pay the standard charges, which varied according to the distance the letter was carried. The

price for the first 80 miles was 2d, 80-140 miles, 4d. and over 140 miles 6d, though if the letter consisted of two sheets of paper twice these rates were charged and if of three sheets, treble rates applied. And prices had continued to go up.

The system only conveyed letters between designated post towns and people had to make their own arrangements for collecting them from the post office. In Cambridge there was a free delivery within the town centre, though when new houses were built a bit further out – in places such as Barnwell or along Regent Street – the new residents found the postman refused to call. Even a debtor imprisoned in the gaol on Castle Hill was told he would have to pay delivery for his letters. This was galling for people in the countryside, as Wale explained. "It takes two days post to Cambridge from most places, except London, and those of us out at Shelford who have to rely on the usual market carriers do not get our letters till late in the evening of the second or third day, much too late for answering by that evening's post. That means five or six days elapse before the answer to any letter reaches any part except London. What we wanted was a regular letter carrier to be appointed to bring letters from Cambridge in the morning to all the villages between Trumpington and Duxford – that's over 3,000 people within a ten mile walk. One man could do that easily, get his dinner and rest at Duxford and then come back and collect the letters for that evening's post. We were prepared to pay an extra 1d. a letter which would cover his wages, and show a profit for the postmaster. We got opposition from the people at Sawston, where they already had a private mail bag dropped off by one of the coaches that passed through the village, but we stuck to our guns and got the postmaster to agree. In the first year 20,000 letters were handled by the Penny Post, bringing them in a profit of nearly £17.

"But then our postman started to work for himself & they brought down an officer from Bow Street to investigate. It seems that where he should have taken 1d, he charges 2d & instead of taking the letter to the Post Office he occasionally kept back one or two to Cambridge addresses & delivered them himself pocketing the postage. When he came to trial he was sentenced to ten month's hard labour, despite being given an excellent character by Sir Charles Wale and several other persons & having already been imprisoned two months waiting for trial"

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The old General was somewhat infuriated at himself for having been so easily duped by both the errant postman and the fraudulent Lord. But he confessed that, having battled through many noisy engagements in the service of his country, he was now succumbing to a battle he could not win – deafness

"I fell into the river, on a raw and gusty day the other December whilst skating. This left me with a violent cold which impaired my mental powers and left me very drained. But I mustered all my strength and recovered, save for this cursed deafness. I have tried to cure it with hot onions, but with no effect. Sometimes I can hear clearly, at other times when it is bad then I am forced to use an ear-trumpet", and he produced an impressive-looking instrument of the latest design.

"One morning recently I set out to visit a fellow-officer who lives within a short ride of Bury St Edmunds but, meeting an old acquaintance at Newmarket, I was persuaded to tarry awhile. I put up my nag at the Ram and we adjourned to an elegant entertainment which was then about to grace the board. Having dissected the joints, fowls and so on, and demolished the pastries, the cloth was removed and we filled our glasses to many a favourite toast, until the time came when I had to continue my journey.

"Whether it was the potency of the wine, or some abstraction of the mind I cannot say, but I became beguiled from the right course; and after three hour's riding found myself at a dead stand-still where four cross-roads met, in a part of the country to which I was an utter

stranger. There was a direction post but it had been rendered useless by both the attack of time and the activities of little wanton boys.

"Then I espied an old farmer in a jog-trot pace, making towards me so I bawled out 'Hallo! my good man, can you tell me the way to Higham, for I am quite at fault?' 'Lack-a-daisy, sir', he answered, 'you're mortally out o' your way; whoy, if it be that you want to go there you must go down hin hinder lane, then turn round to the left over yin yinder common, then you'll see a hol and a pightal, and the old mill, and master's noine acre-piece o'whate; then keep along the right, and then the left, and down our home medders, and then up the …'

"But by now I was lost; 'Stay, stay, my good friend' I exclaimed in the midst of the farmer's harangue, 'you don't know I am unfortunately deaf', and I began to pull out my faithful ear-trumpet. But the farmer no sooner espied the shining end of it than he set spurs to his steed and galloped off with the swiftness of the wind, for, clod, not comprehending my last words, he mistook it for a blunderbuss, and me for a highwayman.

"Away I went after him, bawling out for the fellow to stop, and the fellow roaring out for mercy, not daring to look behind him. So we proceeded three or four miles, the muzzle of my horse close upon the rum of the farmer's, till at last, coming to the Earl of Bristol's park, the farmer, espying a breach in the paling, rode through in a twinkle and got clear off, leaving me as lost as ever. But, fortunately I discerned a cottage where the inmates put me in the right way – though I had ten or twelve miles still to travel, so it was near twelve at night before I finally reached my friend's door."

It might have been worse; the rustic farmer might have been a Cambridge undergraduate, for they were notorious in accosting travellers; was there not that famous case of Dr John Dod of whom it was said:

"A Grave Divine; precise, not turbulent;
And never guilty of the Churches rent:
Meek even to sinners; most devout to God:
This is but part of the due praise of Dod"

Dr Dod had frequently observed the irregular behaviour of some of the students of the University, particularly their excess in drinking, to which they were greatly addicted, and taken the occasion to explode such practices in public from the pulpit. But one day when making his regular journey from Cambridge to Ely he met several of these young sparks who, recognising him, decided to have some sport with the Reverend gentleman. Dr Dod kept jogging on, little thinking of any plot forming against him, at length arrived where the students were waiting for him.

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John Dod had been a remarkable man; precocious as a schoolboy, full of wit and quick at learning. He had gained admission to Jesus College at the age of 14 in 1563 and was elected first a scholar and afterwards a fellow. But there had been so very many dons, deans and doctors in between, why should it be that Doctor Dod should be recalled. In part it was because of his preoccupation with the demon drink: "The Sinner is the Devil's Miller, always grinding, and the Devil is always filling the hopper, that the Mill may not stand still". He was always preaching about it: "A drunkard is the annoyance of modesty, The spoil of civility, His own shame, His wife's sorrow, His children's curse, The alehouse man's benefactor, A walking swill bowl, The picture of a beast, And monster of a man".

Not surprisingly others did not agree and one day he was ambushed by a group of undergraduates as he jogged along on his horse. They enquired of the good man if the report they had heard of his having preached against drunkenness of late was true. Mr Dod affirmed that he had indeed inveighed against a vice so very detestable in the sight of God and all good men. Would he not preach to them there and then, the students enquired. Certainly not, Dod protested, it was unreasonable to require a man, publicly to deliver his sentiments upon any subject, without first giving him an opportunity to ruminate the same in his own thoughts in private. But, the students answered, they had been told he was a master of elocution and never at a loss for matter on any subject

But he could not preach without a pulpit – and there was none nearby. Oh but there was – and his tormentors forced him into a hollow tree that stood beside the road. And what subject should he preach – why something of interest to all of them – Malt. The Reverend Doctor Dod had no choice. From the ruined tree he began:

"Dearly Beloved, let me crave your attention. I am a little man, come at a short warning, to deliver a brief discourse upon a small subject to a thin congregation, and from an unworthy pulpit. My text is MALT which cannot be divided into words, it being but one; nor into syllables, it being but one; therefore, of necessity, I must reduce it into letters, which I find to be these: **M.-A.-L.-T**.

"M - my beloved, is Moral. **A** - is Allegorical. **L** - is Literal and T - is Theological.

"The *moral* is set forth to teach you drunkards good manners; therefore **M** - my Masters **A** - All of you **L** - Listen **T** - to my Text

"The *allegorical* is when one thing is spoken, and another is intended; the thing expressed is MALT; the thing signified is the oil of MALT, which you Bacchanals make **M** - your Meat, **A** - your Apparel, **L** - your Liberty, and **T** - your Text.

"The *literal* is according to the letter: **M** - Much **A** - Ale, **L** - Little **T** - Thrift.

"The *theological* is according to the effects it produces, which I find to consist of two kinds. The effects it produces in this world are, in some **M** - Murder, in others **A** - Adultery, in all, **L** - Licentious Lives, in many **T** - Treason.

"The effects in the world to come, are **M** - Misery **A** - Anguish **L** - Lamentation **T** - Torment.

"Now, Sirs, **M** - my Masters **A** - All of you **L** - Leave off **T** – Tippling or **M** - my Masters **A** - All of you **L** - Look for **T** - Torment."

And with that he descended from his wooden pulpit, remounted his pony and continued his journey

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Having been regaled with the exploits of one Cambridge don, the gathering in the University Arms Hotel was treated to the story of another – Professor Richard Porson. He'd been born in East Ruston, the son of a worsted-weaver who was also the parish clerk, and a mother who'd had some learning, she'd been a servant in a large country house with access to the library.

The young Richard was quick to learn – first how to work the loom, then how to help in the harvest field, then how to read and write. So his father decided to take him to school in Happisburgh whose head was a Latin scholar. The teacher recognised a talent and passed him back to the curate at East Ruston who in turn introduced him to a Cambridge University professor who had him sent up to Eton. Even here the Norfolk dumpling made his mark amongst the sons of gentlemen and in due course he ended up at Trinity College, Cambridge. He could have become a Fellow if only he'd taken Holy Orders, but this he refused to do and he left Cambridge for a life of poverty in London, living for six weeks on a single guinea.

But then his luck turned, he was elected Regius Professor of Greek at his old university, though the stipend was only £40 a year & he could not afford to live in Cambridge regularly. He became one of the finest classical scholars, and a great character.

Wale took up the story: "Porson was travelling in a stagecoach when a young Oxonian, fresh from college, was amusing the ladies with a variety of small talk, to which he added a quotation, as he said, from Sophocles. A Greek quotation, and in a stagecoach too, roused the professor who, in a dog-sleep, was slumbering in one corner of the vehicle. Rubbing his eyes, he turned to the speaker: 'I think, young gentleman, you just now favoured us with a quotation from Sophocles; I don't happen to recollect it there'. 'Oh? Sir', replied the Oxonian, 'the quotation is word for word as I repeated it, and in Sophocles too; but I suspect, Sir, it is some time since you were at college'.

"Porson, applying his hand to his great coat, took out a small pocket edition of Sophocles, and handed it to the tyro, saying he would be much obliged if he would show him the passage in that little book. Having rummaged the pages for some time, 'Upon second thoughts', said the Oxonian, 'I now recollect 'tis in Euripides'. 'Then', said the professor, putting his hand into his pocket, and handing him a similar edition of that author, 'perhaps you will be so good as to find it for me in that little book'.

"The student returned again to his task, but with no better success, muttering to himself – 'Curse me if ever I quote Greek again in a coach'. The ladies tittered: at last. 'Bless me, Sir', said he, 'how dull I am! I recollect now, - yes, Sir, I perfectly remember, the passage is in Aeschylus'.

"The inexorable professor applied again to his inexhaustible pocket, and was in the act of haning an Aeschylus to the astonished freshmen, when he vociferated – 'Stop the coach, - hollo, - coachman let me out, I say – instantly let me out; there's a fellow here has got the whole Bodleian Library in his pocket; let me out I say, let me out, he must be Porson or the Devil'.

"Certainly I found Porson a difficult man", added Wale; "I saw him several times at private parties and never recollect him except as drunk or brutal. Once at a friend's house he drank the spirits of wine for the lamp, and on another occasion gulped down the embrocation. He became very dirty and was often refused entrance when visiting friends, for the servants couldn't understand that he was a Cambridge University Professor of Greek.

“In his last years of life he married a widow and even his wedding day was eccentric. They married at eight in the morning and parted directly afterwards, although he joined her at her brother’s house in the evening to break the news of their marriage. Then he went off to his favourite pub where he stayed until eight the next morning. But his wife understood his problem and had started to cure him of his worst drinking habits when she died. He was tolerated for his talents: he used to recite, or rather vomit pages of all languages and could hiccup Greek like a helot, and when he died he was buried with honour in Trinity College chapel. I should not have wanted to be trapped with him in a coach – but then one must be wary of any Cambridge academic”

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The Reverend Henry Wale continued with his tales of eccentric dons:

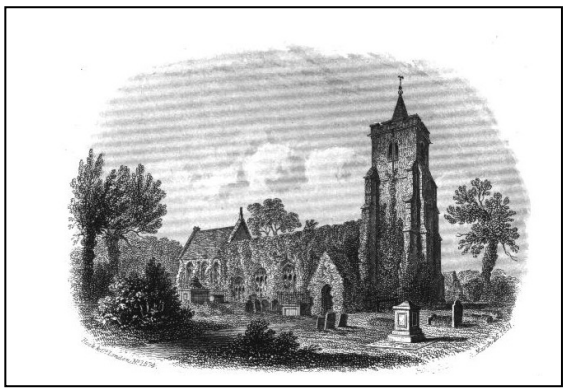
“There was one in particular, Rev Samuel Peck, a Fellow of Queen’s college who lived at Grantchester. He was a real character, not exactly given to large-scale expenditure, if he could help it.

“On one occasion a gentleman I know arrived at Grays Inn, London to take the Fly coach back to Cambridge and found Peck already seated, together with two ladies who seemed to be entire strangers to each other. When the coach stopped at Epping Place for breakfast Peck suggested that the ladies ought not to be allowed to pay any share – which my friend agreed to. It was the same at Chesterford when the expense of dinner was shared by the gentlemen, and they were awarded by smiles. On arrival at Trumpington the coachman pulled up and my friend was surprised when Peck and the two ladies got off and straightway got into Peck’s own coach. Only later did he discover that the ladies were in fact Peck’s housekeeper and housemaid who had lived with him some years!

“Peck knew more of village law than any Chairman of the Quarter Sessions, knew when the overseers of the poor and the surveyors of highways should be appointed and their various duties. His rooms were over the gateway Queens’ College and on a Saturday from eight in the morning to four or five in the afternoon country people from around the area flocked to there for advice. He would give them an answer and then tell them: ‘A lawyer would have put you to expense; Sam Peck never takes a fee, but he loves gratitude, and he will accept a few sausages, a joint of pork, a couple of fowls, a goose or a turkey, that your farm produces’. Thus he lived well and built up a reputation for generosity and each evening his boy came over from Grantchester with a light cart to fetch away the provisions that had been brought in the course of the day

“People used to smile at this and a chap named Bareblock from King’s College produced a wonderful sketch he entitled ‘The Triumphal entry of a PECK loaf into Grantchester. It shows old Peck on his pony, his man riding on a pillion behind him, holding on tight by his coat. He’s loaded with a peck loaf on his head and a basket containing a couple of fowls, a bottle containing Trinity audit ale and a pair of stays for his housekeeper on his arm. I showed this to an old woman who’d been a servant of his when a girl and she said it was just like him – ‘And there’s Joe and the old dog – ah I’ve gon that many a bone’, she added. And she told me a rhyme that was meant for an epitaph about him

Here lies a PECK as some Men say,
Was first of all a PECK of Clay;
This wrought with skill divine while fresh,
Became a curious PECK of Flesh.
Full sixty years PECK felt life’s bubbles,
Till Death relieved a PECK of troubles;



And then he Died as all things must,
And here he lies a PECK of Dust.

"If Peck hadn't died in 1791 he could have saved the parish a dilemma. There's an old belief in Grantchester that if any of the parishioners fall on hard times and lose their home – from whatever cause – they can take up residence in the church porch, in which case the parish authorities have to find them a house. A few years ago a man with his wife and family decided to put this into practice, and when the congregation went to church on Sunday morning they found the church porch had been turned into a home, with a curtain across the entrance. Now Peck was dead by then and nobody knew whether they had a case or not, but anyway by the next Sunday the family were found a larger residence.

"In those days the doors were on the inner end of the church porch so the vestry decided to move them to the front, so as to prevent anybody else taking advantage – you can see where the tops have been cut off to make them fit. That was part of a restoration project finished three years ago when they opened up the west window, put in a ringing floor for the bellringers and built the new pulpit. Peck would hardly recognise the place if he came back"

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The mention of Grantchester had a profound effect on Solomon, the poetic former undergraduate: "I visited the church on one occasion; there was a gallery at the west end of the nave which was occupied by the village choir who provided the music. Two of them played clarinets, one a violincello – the combination of instruments was odd, but not so odd as they sound they produced. There was no attempt at harmony, or even melody, in unison. Each individual went his own way, or rather the way his instrument chose to take him. The clarinets were particularly erratic and produced alarums and excursions at the most unexpected moments. The clerk gave out one line of the hymn and then proceeded to sing it as a solo, while the musicians grumbled around the melody – not quite there, but thereabouts. The congregation never joined in, we stood respectfully listening to the nasal-voiced parson snuffling out some dreary tune, while discord reigned triumphant around him", he recalled.

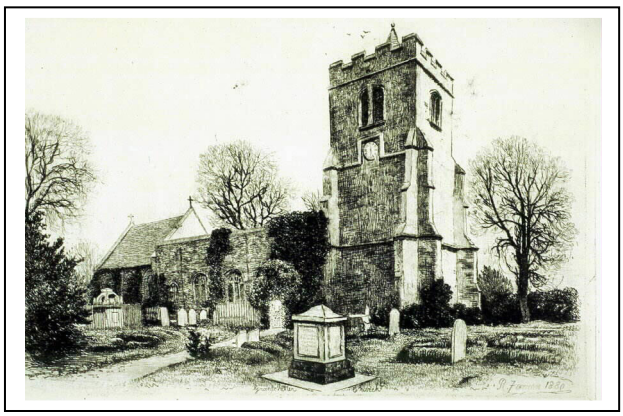
"But that was better than it used to be", broke in Wale, "previously at the end of prayers the old clerk would get up and say 'If there's anybody that can pitch a tune I'll give out a hume, but if there aint t'aint no use'. And then about five years ago they purchased an organ for about £60; it was one with two barrels, playing ten tunes – but they can get boring, week after week and there's talk of making it into a finger-organ.

"But Grantchester churchyard is only small and if you think of the number of years its been in use and the number of people buried there over the last 800 years – even if it was only six a year that's nearly 5,000 souls. Mind you many poor people can't afford their own coffins – they are sewed up in a sheet and carried to the grave in the parish coffin, which is taken away once the ceremony's over.

But on top of that – or them – there are all the strangers who aren't parishioners who have chosen to be buried there because of the holy peace of the place. One was a young man who had died a long way from home and been buried in part of a foreign field that would be forever America. For in Grantchester churchyard is a tomb with this inscription: - 'Sacred to the memory of William Jauncey, of the city of New York, in the United States of America and Fellow Commoner of St John's College, Cambridge. He died November 19 1830 aged 19 years'. And Solomon had penned this elegy

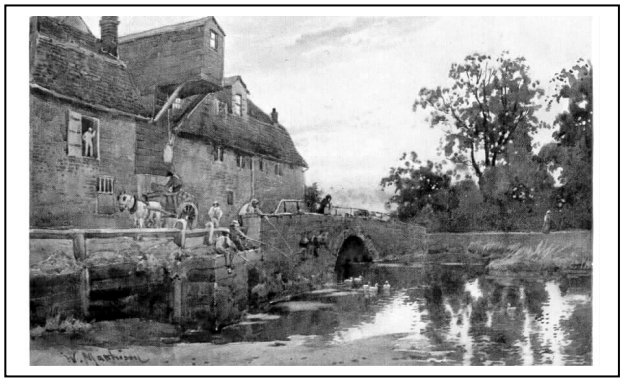
Youth! thou didst pass that fearful hour alone, -
No lip to cheer, no ear to catch each moan,
Thy fever'd cheek, by friendship's care unfann'd,

Thy throbbing brow unpresse'd by mother's hand.
Sad visions thronged the night of thy clos'd eye;
The eloquent scenery of thy home went by –
There was thy bright broad Hudson flowing still
Glassing his islets green; each tremulous hill



With sping's young foliage quiv'ring; - there one nook
Yet wore its own, its calm domestic look;
There sat thy mother with her known fond smile
And thought-arrested eye – perchance the while
Some quick vague yearning o'er her absent son
Falling like night her placid soul upon –
(Such whisp'rings oft breathe angels in their flight
Did we but read the tale they tell aright)

And thou – yet better far Truth's one stern pang
Than vain surmise and Fear's long-lingering fang –
Wast stretch'd beneath the death-gasp all unblest,
Above thee frown'd the turret's battled crest,
And thro' wreathed mullions breath'd the evening air
Telling how far the skies thou loved'st were.
- The strife is o'er – oft as spring's flowers return
Here England's primrose blows around thine urn;



And here, when wakes the Sabbath's gentle hour,
Floats quiet music from yon modest tower –
Choice spot! – be mine such resting-place as this!
My grass-mound thus let pensile willow kiss!
Granta belov'd! where Widsom's waters flow,
Thy noblest meed for this would I forego –
One quick'ning draught of Siloa's sacred wave,
A heart regenerate, and such a grave!

Youth's dancing step should oft pause musing there,
While holy sympathy inspir'd a prayer.
And the brief friend of a stranger's tomb
Bade start the tear 'neath study's tassel'd plume

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It's a wonder that an American would visit Grantchester at all, mused Wale, and if he did he would not understand what the people were saying. For the village, like others in the locality, had its own language with words unfound in any normal dictionary. To prove his point Wale challenged Pickwick to interpret some of them:

Beezlins – milk from a cow soon after calving which people bake until it becomes thick like custard
Cad – the smallest pig in a litter
Clung – soil when its sticky and heavy
Dint – violence or force, thus 'We are just in the dint of the storm'
Doddy – little or small
Dunt – 'Noise enough to dunt you' – to deafen
Fleet – shallow: 'I want a fleet pie dish'
Frawn – frozen
Gambel – the crooked piece of wood or iron on which butchers hang carcases

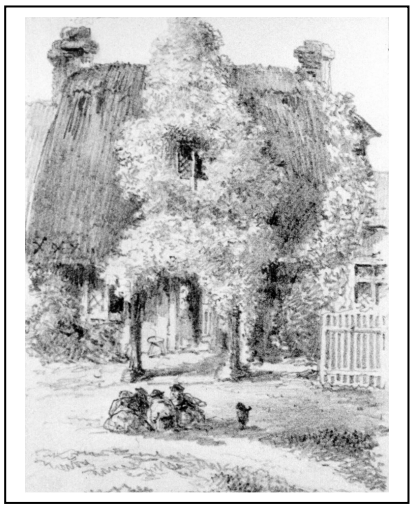
Gon – like the old servant said, 'I've gon that dog many a bone' – means to give
Higgledy-piggledy – but this one Pickwick had heard before; it meant irregular or intermixed and in Suffolk they had similar words such as *crinkum-crankum*, *fiddle-faddle*, *gibble gabble, harum scarum*, *hodge-podge*, *hurry-scurry*, and *topsy-turvy*
Hodmadod was a snail

Horkey was the traditional feast after harvest at which folk would take to the *Jill* - a timber carriage on two wheels, and *jub* to the barn – the pace between a trot and a walk – provided it was not 'out o'*kelter* or in bad condition. However if the wheelwright had *outed* it – done his work badly and it was *caselty* (rickety and likely to give way) or somebody had removed the *plunder-stick* (a bar of wood which secured the cart-body to the shafts, which if removed would tip the cart) it might *cop* (throw) the passengers into the *routy* (rough grass around a dung heap), making them *slubby* (muddy) and *grumpy* (a bit out of temper) and result in a *clink* o'the head' (a blow) or a *hiding* (flogging) to the person who had been *gommussing* – gadding about.

The Horkey feast was the culmination of the harvest and held after the last load of corn had been brought from the fields. "When I was a lad at Harston", Wale recounted, "I was invited to join the Lord of the Harvest and his Queen - a man dressed up as a woman – the pitcher, rake, leader and rick builder perched on top of the last cart. But I didn't know what was to come. First the men cut leafy branches with long stems and stuck them on the top of the load to form a sort of shelter and then the driver, who was sitting under a heap of corn, took the reins. 'Hold-gee' he called and we began the journey through the village. We entered the street singing and were greeted with cheering from the crowds – I thought this was a real treat. But then the men on the cart started shouting 'Horkey home' Now water!' and I saw some of the village boys and girls had got pails with them. Then – swish – came a shower of water from one side, and then – swish - from the other. I wondered what was in the pails to start with, and was relieved when I saw them refilling them from the village stream. Soon we were all drenched to the skin, but we had to keep up our singing till we arrived at the Pembroke Arms. Then we went back again, but this time the crowds just cheered. They say it was part of a ritual to encourage rain to fall on the seed of the next harvest".

Even in Cambridge they celebrate the custom, as Col Wale recalled: "At the hawkie, as it is called there, I have seen a clown dressed in woman's clothes, having his face painted, his head decorated with ears of corn, carried in a waggon, with great pomp and loud shouts, through the streets, the horses being covered with white sheets. And when I asked the meaning of the ceremony I was told they were drawing the harvest queen."

"It all culminated in the horkey feast, Wale junior continued: "the cart shed was cleared out and cleaned up and the walls decorated with sheaves of corn. They put some trestle tables together and covered them in white cloths and we had a real good supper – beef and plum pudding and ale. Then the Master would call for order and give a little speech thanking the men for their work and the oldest hand would reply. Then it was
'Drink boys, drink and mind you do not spill
For if you do, you shall drink two, it is our Master's will'.
Not that I participated in the drinking", he added with a wink.



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"That American chap in Grantchester churchyard; what do you know about him?" asked the Colonel. Secundus was able to furnish details: "His name was

William Jauncey, he was about 19 years of age and possessed of a considerable fortune so he became a Fellow-Commoner at St John's college. In November 1830 that he and a group of others were hare hunting in the open fields at Barton. They were just collecting the hares together to return to Grantchester when one of them tried a final jump over a fence but he fell off his horse which galloped away. William and one of the others rode after to try and stop it but the two collided at great speed and he was thrown to the ground. He was picked up and taken to Mr Lilley's house in Grantchester, quite insensible. They immediately summoned medical assistance from Cambridge but to no avail. The poor fellow never recovered."

"The reason I asked is that I knew a young man who went off to America about 50 years ago – and there was money involved there, but in a different way. He was the nephew of one of the Professors and had won a University medal for something or other. He was the brightest of men, but also the idlest of men in the University so low a profligate, that even in those days, when the standard of morals was not very high, he was shunned by all the men of his own standing.

"Deprived of the society of his equals, he was constantly scheming to introduce himself to younger men who had heard nothing of his character. He would knock on a chap's door about breakfast time and ask to fill his tea-pot from the kettle, as he had suffered his fire to go out. Of course he would be invited to stay for breakfast and was soon perfectly at home. His conversation was most entertaining and, being a medallist, he was quickly considered to be a worthy friend by the young man concerned.

"But the bed-maker soon told of his true character: he was in every one's debt and treated his creditors with such insolence that he could not obtain a quarter of a pound of tea on credit. He played the same trick on almost every one in college. At other times he would beg to remain in the room of a stranger, till his bed- maker came to open the door of his own room, which had been inadvertently shut in his absence; but this invariably happened when the man had a party drinking wine with him. It was then the custom for the undergraduates to send in to the Dean once a-week a Latin theme: this he would volunteer to write for any one who complained of the difficulty of the task. He pretended to be angry when offered a compensation, but he was not long before he took an opportunity of borrowing a much larger sum than he could have ventured to ask for as the price of his labour. In this way he contrived to procure a tolerable share of the comforts which the college afforded, equally regardless of the sneers of the younger, and the contempt of the senior members of the society.

He was a tolerable musician, and got friendly with a lad called Tom Bullen, who was passionately fond of music. At that time the grand commemoration of Handel took place in Westminster Abbey. Bullen was most anxious to be present, but despaired of raising the requisite funds. His new friend told him that was no object, as he was daily expecting to receive a large sum of money: he would defray the whole expense, and Bullen might repay him when it suited his convenience.

Preparations were made for their departure, and they only waited for the letter containing the money. At length it came; of course it contained no cash, but a promise it would arrive next week. Bullen had set his heart upon going to the Abbey, and was seriously annoyed at the circumstance but his friend suggested, that if he knew any one in the University who would advance the money for a week, at the end of that time he should be punctually repaid. Bullen said that a Fellow of Sidney, of the name of Heslop, a particular friend of his mother, would lend it him for that short time. He made

the application and succeeded, and the two friends set off for London.

They attended several of the meetings in the Abbey but on examining the state of their finances, they found that they had barely sufficient to take them to Cambridge on the outside of the coach. So it was suggested to Bullen that they should wrap around them as much of their clothes and linen as they conveniently could, stuff their pockets as full as possible and leave the rest at their hotel, the Golden Cross, Charing Cross, thus avoiding the inconvenience of paying the bill. Once back in Cambridge they found – surprise surprise - that the expected windfall was not forthcoming and poor Bullen was forced to apply to his mother, who out of a very limited income sent her son sufficient to pay his debts. And that, in short is why the young man, was obliged to quit college: he went to America, where he became an assistant in a school.

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"Speaking of impecunious undergraduates – tell him of your recollections of Thomas Adkin", prompted the Colonel and the Rev Henry Wale was happy to oblige:

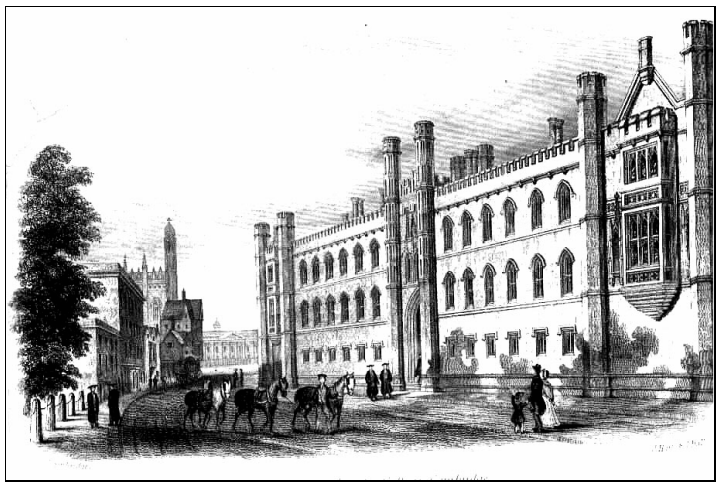
" Tommy Adkind was the only child of a gentleman of landed property at Downham Market. His father died when he was but an infant and left him to the guardianship of a too indulgent mother. Unwilling to trust him out of her sight, she engaged a private tutor, who was enjoined not to devote too much of his pupil's time to study, but to attend particularly to his amusements.

"The family estate was about £1,500 per annum, which in 1760 (the date of his birth) was considered a very fine property. When eighteen years of age he was admitted a Fellow-Commoner at Corpus Christi College here in Cambridge where discipline was better supported than at any other college in the University. He had a very liberal allowance; and his mother gave instructions to the tutor to supply him with more if required.

"He soon commenced a career of dissipation, and neglected everything a man is sent to the University to learn. Notwithstanding the leniency practised towards Fellow-Commoners, he was repeatedly committing follies it was impossible to overlook. Yet such was his good humour and ready wit, that he always contrived to raise a smile - generally at his own expense - and was never known to receive more than a. slight reprimand, and frequently none at all. By his convivial and social disposition, and by the splendour of his entertainments, he became acquainted with the first society - and rarely was a party given by the fashionable men of the University at which "Tom" was not a welcome guest. He could always take a considerable share in conversation, amongst men who were infinitely his superiors in point of acquirements.

"Adkin's wit was of a peculiar kind that after passing an evening in his company, it was difficult to call to mind any thing particularly choice that he had said; and yet everyone would have missed him had he been absent. He possessed the faculty of saying common things in an uncommon manner; and it was difficult to tell, when he commenced a sentence, how it would end; but his listeners were generally surprised into a laugh at a most unexpected conclusion. He not infrequently made the failings of others who were present subjects for his ridicule; yet his manner was so humorous, that the person laughed at was seldom offended, but frequently joined in the laugh as heartily as the rest of us.

“As soon as he had taken his B.A. degree, the college, whose rules he had so frequently violated, was glad to get rid of him, and he being full of money - either from the sale or mortgage of some of his property – Tom was very glad to exchange his confined rooms at Corpus for a handsome suite of apartments at the White Bear Inn opposite Trinity College. This is one of the largest inns in town, and from that time it acquired the name of ‘Adkin College’. Through his support it flourished in an unexampled manner, and Alderman Gurford, who kept it, became one of the wealthiest townsmen.



“Adkin's dinners were very frequent, and generally very riotous ones. Whenever the Proctors entered the inn, to send turn out any undergraduates who might be found amongst so tumultuous an assemblage, they were immediately informed by the waiter that the noise proceeded from a private room where Squire Adkin was, giving a dinner to a few friends. When the proctors asked the waiters whether there were any undergraduates at the party they never failed to answer, they could not tell, but imagined there were none, as they had seen neither caps nor gowns, and that the gentlemen were all in boots and leather breeches. It may appear strange that such a state of things so injurious to the discipline of the University should be suffered to continue but the authorities had a dread of squandering their funds in litigation, where nothing was certain but the expense.

“But even Adkin's means were not inexhaustible and the time arrived when he could no longer pay for such expensive entertainment. But his credit still survived, and he continued to give parties. He had brought so much custom to the inn that the landlord would have been sorry to part with him on any terms and when he’d been well off he’d taken the precaution of being unbounded in his liberality to every member of the house. But now he was getting quite desperate for ready cash and started various scams to raise a few shillings – even tried to con some money out of me”

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Thomas Adkin tried several ways to obtain extra cash, as Wale explained

“In November 1785, soon after the introduction of balloons into this country, a Captain Poole ascended in one from the grove belonging to Trinity Hall. Adkin promised to dispose of as many tickets as he could, and canvassed all his friends for the purpose. I requested to have two, which he sent to my rooms when I was absent, so I called and paid for them at the bar of the White Bear – or Adkin’s College as it was by then known.

“But Adkin had met my bedmaker the same morning and told her that as I was not at home he wished she would advance ten shillings for the tickets, for he was desirous of collecting and paying up the entire sum. She’d immediately given him the money; but when she found I had already paid she was most upset.

“Sal Elvedge, never scrupled supplying herself with coals, candles and so on from undergraduate’s stores, but they were what she considered her perquisites and the bedmakers not being sufficiently paid it was the custom amongst them to help themselves to what they considered little necessaries. She was also bedmaker to one of the Professors of Anatomy

and such was her well-known propensity to drink, that he would frequently leave temptation in her way, which she could never resist. Whenever his specimens required fresh spirits, instead of throwing away what was unfit for use, he would put it in a jug which he placed in his gyp-room, and in a very few days it had disappeared. When he challenged her about it Sal never attempted to deny it, but said she believed her life had been saved by the liquor, for it had proved a remedy for a violent attack of colic she had been long subject to.

"But Sal took great care that nobody else took advantage of her charges and determined to retrieve the money Adkin had tricked from her. Off she set for the inn where she told the waiter she wanted to see Mr. Adkin on particular business. She was desired to send up her name, and the cloth being just removed following a meal he'd supplied to a group of his friends, it was unanimously voted she should be desired to walk up stairs. Sal was by no means of the bashful order, and sat herself down in an arm-chair next to the host. She seemed much pleased with the novelty of her situation, and drank with great good will many bumpers of claret that were presented to her. Every now and then she reminded Adkin of the object of her visit, when the company exclaimed 'Fine her a bumper of claret for dunning the president in the midst of his friends!' and to this she submitted without a murmur. In this manner she passed half-an-hour very agreeably, when remembering she had many duties unperformed, she arose to depart, but would not leave the room until she received a promise of payment. But a promise was one thing, the actual cash something entirely different.

"Tom Adkin was on the most intimate terms with the late John Mortlock, Mayor of Cambridge, and rarely missed attending the public dinners which were given at the Town Hall. His celebrity was such that he became a universal favourite with all the Corporation, and when it was proposed to give him the freedom of the borough, it was carried by acclamation. He then conceived a scheme to relieve himself from his pecuniary difficulties by entering the church.

"His powerful friends smoothed the way and helped him prepare for the final hurdle, an examination by the Bishop, even showing him the three or four verses that he would be required to construe. It started well: 'His lordship, putting a Testament into my hand,' Tom told me, 'pointed out a passage in one of the Gospels, consisting of the three verses I had learned. I did two of them but then I dropped the book and couldn't find the right page. Of course I knew the final verse by heart and carried on, but unfortunately the Bishop noticed. Thus owing, not to my ignorance, but to my awkwardness, perished all my hopes of preferment in the Church; for, had it not been for this misfortune, I should undoubtedly have been an Irish Bishop'

"After this I frequently heard of him, and occasionally met him in the streets of Cambridge. His spirits gradually forsook him, and he indulged in wine to great excess, so much so as to become insensible to everything. When at last his resources became entirely exhausted, two or three of his most intimate friends allowed him £200 a-year for life and some years he passed a good deal of his time at Sir George Leeds' mansion at Croxton Park. When returning one evening the carriage overturned and Tom broke his arm, but he was so drunk he was not aware of the fact until the following day. Many say that he drank deeply to drown thought, but he perished a warning to others of the evil of insobriety"

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Discussions at the University Arms were interrupted by the arrival of a University man, Pickwick's travelling companion and benefactor, Henry Gunning of Christ's College. Nor were introductions needed to his other companions for both the Reverend Henry Wale and the Colonel were old acquaintances, and Solomon took the opportunity to take his exit.

Pickwick described as to how he had been duped by the rascals at the Wrestler's Inn and how Gunning had come to his aid, but Gunning was soon recounting how he too had been cheated by a scoundrel – a scoundrel who had been Master of his College.

"It was some 30 years ago, just after Dr Browne has been appointed to the Headship; the first thing he did was to get married, to a woman I myself was well acquainted with. In those days I had a farm out at Ickleton which had a reputation for its excellent coursing and shooting and as Browne was an enthusiast for the sport he and his new wife used to stay with me frequently. We became great friends until he came up with a remarkable offer

"The college owned land at Bourn, where enclosure had just taken place, and there was a farm that I could have on very advantageous terms, together with the tithes of the whole parish. I was in those days passionately fond of farming, and did not like my farm at Ickleton, because it was unenclosed. But I was able to support my family in comfort and the land there was dry and light soil, far better than the wet and heavy clays of Bourn. I told him 1 was not young enough to transplant, and that I feared I should never take root elsewhere. But he would not take no for an answer; he was anxious to promote my prosperity and I should have a one-and-twenty years' lease that I could leave at any time. So I gave in and agreed to take possession as soon as the house could be made ready.

"So in the August I rode over with him to the village to look at the allotment, as far as it was then known, and to see the house which he said he was making very comfortable with an enclosed garden. It sounded idyllic but nothing could be more desolate and forlorn than everything I saw about me.

"The lands were ploughed into what the farmers call highbacks; in the furrows, the rushes were growing from one end to the other. The crops of oats I estimated at eight bushels an acre; the barley might be about three quarters. The wheat on the ridges was very fine; but even there it was over-topped by the thistles. As you descended towards the furrows, the wheat became gradually worse; so that, on the whole, I think it did not exceed twelve bushels an acre. The beans were so overrun by thistles and bellbind (instead of hoeing, it was the invariable practice to turn in sheep and lambs to eat off the weeds), that at a short distance you could not tell what the land had been sown with.

"As we got nearer the village the crops in the old enclosures improved & the quality of the pastures appeared to be excellent, though they were overrun with bushes and weeds. The farmers' way of dealing with them was to turn in their sheep when they left the commons and when they had eaten them quite bare, they used to feed them with hay. This was not given them in racks, but thrown down in small bundles under the hedges; out of these pastures they were never removed until Bourn Feast, on the 16th of May.

"The provisional allotment for the College, though nothing was then definitively settled, laid well for draining, and was of very good quality. After dinner we had a long discussion about its capability of improvement. We both agreed that the whole parish must be drained, and a better system of farming introduced; but I could not help remarking that in its present state, notwithstanding the enormously high price of corn, the tithes would be hardly worth the expense of collecting.

And there was a problem with the new roads being set out. The Enclosure commissioners were required to make the roads before they proceeded to the other business of the enclosure but were only forming barrel-shaped roads, without laying upon them a single load of gravel or stones. The materials were only to be procured (if at all) in a brook near Caldecote; so that, in order to form the road that leads from Two Pot House to Bourn the materials would have to be carted through the whole length of the College allotment. Thus the annoyance might be

continued for years, as the College would have no power to prevent it until the award was signed.

But Browne was able to put my mind at rest about all these details; he was both the Master and the Bursar of my college, he was a family friend, he was handling everything himself – it was bound to go well – or so I hoped.

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Pickwick listened as the Rev Gunning of Christ's College described how that College's Master had become involved with radical changes in the parish of Bourn:

"Dr Browne seemed to devote the whole of his time to the Bourn enclosure; he spent his Sundays at Cambridge, but no other part of the week; and the Fellows complained they could with difficulty get him to attend a College meeting.

"At that time Joshua Lilley was the college-tenant, and a dispute arose over a field of wheat, which Browne contended, though sown by Lilley, was the property of the College. But Browne took no action until Lilley had reaped the field and was about to carry it. Then Browne, mounted on horseback and attended by several waggons and a large number of labourers (whom he had primed for the occasion by a plentiful supply of beer), entered the field. The labourers employed by Lilley made a show of resistance; but not having been regaled in a similar manner, their valour soon forsook them, and Browne's party triumphantly carried away the produce of the field.

"They placed the sheaves in the Home Close, as they'd not stood a sufficient time to be stacked. But the weather being very showery at the time, and the hedges being in a ruinous state, the Home Close became the general rendezvous of all the pigs in the parish, and, consequently, the by the time the wheat was stacked it was worth but little. Such high-handed action greatly annoyed every farmer in the parish, though it made Browne very popular with the labourers, who enjoyed seeing their master's noses put out of joint."

But if Browne was popular at Bourn he was less so at Christ's; he seemed seldom to be in Cambridge and never condescended to explain why his presence at Bourn was so imperative. When members of college ventured to ask him who the architect was by whose advice he was spending so much money Browne was much displeased. He merely said that all he had done, or projected doing, was approved of by a man he considered a better judge of such business than any architect they could employ. This did not satisfy the college council and their discontent was further increased when, at the audit, no money was forthcoming from the Bourn farm. The only explanation the Master thought proper to give on the subject was, that the money had been all expended in improving the College property.

"He told the Fellows he had determined on making his own bricks, which would be a very profitable business as by selling part of the bricks, he should be at no expense for those required for his own use. But they knew that he was pulling down a great part of the old house, and making other alterations that the College had never sanctioned, and, indeed, on which they had not been consulted. About the only thing he would tell them was of the prodigious quantity of game in the parish, of which his larder furnished abundant proof.

"I was in a difficult position for of course Browne had persuaded me to take a farm and as my presence was required there, I brought my family to the house before it was finished. Browne spent the greater part of the first three weeks with us. We laid out the garden together, and he consulted me upon many improvements he proposed making. He advised me to begin the work of draining so I made a beginning by deepening and widening a small watercourse which was the boundary between my allotment and the parish of Caldecote & quickly

assumed the appearance of a navigable canal. Then I started under-draining but more and more miles of drains seemed to be needed, and the costs mounted.

"Whilst this was going on, Browne used occasionally to ride over, and to commend the spirited way in which I was proceeding. Whenever a field was finished, the next business was to lower the ridges, and to raise the furrows. This I was obliged to do very gradually, as in many cases the ridges were upwards of five feet higher than the furrows. Owing to the high price of labour, this mode of improvement was dreadfully expensive. I began to be alarmed at the prospect before me, particularly as I could not obtain from Browne even a hint of the amount of rent I was to pay, or (what was of more consequence) the conditions on which I was to have a lease"

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While the Master of Christ's College was busily stamping his authority on the Fellows of his college and his own views on the college estates at Bourn, Gunning was very worried about the farm he had taken there.

"To tell the truth I was worried that because of my long friendship with Dr Browne some of the Fellows might imagine that more favourable terms were granted to me than would have been obtained by any other tenant. I wanted to have the area surveyed and terms agreed independently. But Barnes would not listen. He said that for nearly two years he had inspected the whole of the parish over and over again; that he had been upon the land at all seasons, and knew better than any surveyor what it was worth. He claimed that the College had left the whole business in his hands and that I was to have a lease for twenty-one years on very advantageous terms.

"I sought the opinion of a Cambridge merchant who said it appeared madness on the part of the villagers to consent to such an enclosure, leaving their lands subject to tithes in kind. But when the whole parish was improved the tithes would be so valuable that, by letting one-half of them, I might pay the rent of the residue and of the farm besides. Anybody would gladly take such a lease and I, being on good terms with all the Fellows, and particularly patronised by the Master, might expect to have it on terms still more favourable. He based his calculations on the normal rent charged.

"But I still could not get Dr Browne to well me what the rent would be. When eventually he sent me a draft of the lease it was entirely in his own handwriting, and was, I suspect, such a lease as was never offered to any tenant before. I remember to this hour the horror I felt at reading it. The rent was enormous and in addition there were covenants compelling me to take the whole of the tithes in kind, and to collect the tithes of the haulm remaining on the ground after the crop had been carried off. I also had to take to the Master's Lodge at Christ's College a quantity of hay, a certain number of loads of wheat-straw, and certain quantities of oats: all these were to be delivered in certain portions, and at stated periods. For the slightest breach of any of these covenants, the College could turn me out.

"I could not agree to such terms and expressed in very strong terms my surprise and indignation at the treatment I had met with. He replied that it was very clear I did not understand my own interest; we would talk the matter over together; and he had no doubt he should prove to me that they were more favourable than I had any right to expect. But we parted mutually dissatisfied and for the first time I began to doubt the sincerity of his friendship.

"As there was to be a College-meeting shortly I drew up a Memorial stating that I had incurred an enormous expense in improving the College estate, expecting to have a lease on just and equitable terms, but that these were preposterous. A few days later Dr Browne called

upon me, bringing back the Memorial with him. He said he had not shown it to the meeting because they expressed so much surprise on his mentioning my dissatisfaction with the terms. He then, resuming his usual cordial manner, said, 'You know, Gunning, how anxious I am to serve you. The enclosure of Bourn presents an opportunity of doing so, which may never again occur. I know the terms offered are very much to your advantage: consider well before you reject so good an offer. Above all things, make no complaints to the College, however friendly you consider them towards you. They are beginning to throw out hints that the money expended on the Bourn estate is more for your advantage than theirs and will either insist on an increase of rent, or an abridgement of your term of years'. I told him that if I had not sunk so much money, I would not hesitate one moment in giving up the farm. To this he replied, 'If, contrary to my earnest advice, you are determined to leave Bourn, I will repay you out of my own pocket'.

"My suspicion of his sincerity seemed confirmed by this conversation. When I considered the cordial friendship that subsisted between us for so many years I was angry with myself, and felt I was ungrateful to suspect him. But my partner, to whom I showed the lease, said at once: 'He cannot be so ignorant as not to know that the terms he has offered you are not only exorbitant, but ruinous. You are justified in forming the worst opinion of him. He will not scruple to ruin you, if he can derive any advantage from it'. I was horrified and spent many sleepless nights wondering what to do."

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Henry Gunning found it difficult to continue the story of his struggle to preserve himself from the treachery of the master of his college. He felt he had no option but to go to the Fellows of Christ's College direct and acquaint them with what had been going on. To his immense relief he found them sympathetic: "At this interview, my suspicions of Browne's treachery and duplicity were fully confirmed. They assured me they were happy for me to have a lease for twenty-one years but were perfect strangers to the covenants it contained

"The anxiety under which I had been labouring produced a severe illness, which incapacitated me from attending to my business, and for many weeks my medical attendant would not permit me to see any one but my own family. Dr Browne called repeatedly, and was very urgent for an interview. When I was able to see him he again endeavoured to persuade me how much I should be acting against my own interest in not keeping the farm on which I had been laying out so much money. He offered to amend the covenant and promised not to enforce the delivery of hay, straw, and corn at the Lodge.

"A few months before this, I would have signed a carte-blanche at his request; but my eyes were opened. I again went to the Fellows, and informed them of what had passed. I found they objected as much as I did to the activities of the Master. I told them I wanted to give up the farm there and then, but they urged me to hold on to it, otherwise Browne would take it for himself. But they assured me I had their full support. You can imagine my surprise when, three weeks later I received a legal notice to quit, to which the College seal was affixed.

"This was the final straw – the Fellows knew nothing about it at all. They could not get the Master to meet them so had to go above his head, appealing to the Vice-Chancellor. But that post was held by Dr Chafy of Sidney Sussex – whose own outrageous activities were well known to all Cambridge – who saw it as a minor dispute and would not listen.

"By now Dr Browne knew of their actions against him and, using the power given him by the Statutes, he required all the Fellows to come into residence immediately. This caused great consternation for they were scattered across the country and had to leave their curacies, schools, or other situations unprovided for to dash back to Cambridge. And then he cancelled the meeting.

“Browne having thus not only drawn the sword, but thrown away the scabbard, the Fellows were compelled, in self-defence, to have recourse to much stronger measures than they had originally contemplated. They set about gathering evidence - unearthing some very unsavoury details of his profligate and immoral life – and applied to the Visitors to remove the Master from his office. The case was overwhelming, but still the Visitors delayed passing the sentence, though everybody knew what it was to be.

“Then came a grand dinner in the Hall of Trinity College to be attended by Royalty and the most eminent guests. All the Heads of Colleges were invited though nobody thought Browne would accept. Imagine the surprise when he took his seat with the most perfect composure. His neighbour on one side was Bishop Marsh, who not liking his companion, left the table to seek some other situation. This example was followed by three or four more until Browne found himself sitting alone in the centre of the table, apparently quite content.

“A few days afterwards that the verdict of the Visitors was publicly announced and Browne was removed from the Mastership. He owed the College some thirteen hundred pounds which they let him off, although their finances were in a very dilapidated state from his mismanagement. They also refused to block his appointment to a living at Gorleston where he became very popular with his parishioners, who at first fully believed his representations of the cruel persecutions he had undergone at Cambridge. But soon there were disputes, in most of which he came off victorious, as his parishioners had great dread of lawsuits. Among many claims he made was the right of removing from the churchyard all gravestones that chanced to be thrown down by cattle, which he kept there himself. When subsequently building a house, these gravestones were used for the pavement of a scullery and also of an oven, out of which it was reported that a huge loaf was drawn, “Aged 73” ! He died in April, 1832, after a long and painful illness, in the sixty-sixth year of his age.

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“It strikes me sir, that your college – Christ’s – is the home of an unholy breed of men!”

Pickwick was taken somewhat aback by this outburst from the mild-mannered Wale, who continued: “Our family have particular memories of a certain Professor Harwood …” This was a name only too familiar to Gunning.

Sir Busick Harwood had been born in Newmarket, and had served his time with a surgeon. When his articles were expired he went to India, where he remained several years and acquired considerable property. Henry Gunning recalled: “I well remember as an undergraduate my astonishment when listening to his account of the successful operations he had performed upon natives of the highest distinction, who not only paid him with princely liberality, but endeavoured to tempt him by the most splendid offers to give up his European connections, and to attach himself entirely to them.”

Harwood preferred however returning to England, and very soon after his arrival admitted himself a Fellow-Commoner of Christ's College. There he lived in an expensive style, giving frequent dinners, and wine parties. To these he invited, in their turns, all the undergraduates, and became very popular with men of all ages. He was a person of considerable wit according to the fashion of those days, but such as would not be tolerated at the present time. His conversation was profligate and licentious in the extreme, notwithstanding which he was in the habit of living on the most intimate terms with men of the highest station in the University.

In 1785 the position of Professor of Anatomy became vacant. There were two contenders, but Harwood's friends arranged for the election to be called unexpectedly and he was chosen. He was an excellent choice and his Cambridge classes on the 'Structure and Oeconomy of quadrupeds, birds, fishes and amphibia' were always well attended, especially when he demonstrated his pioneering experiments on blood transfusion

Having resided for some years in Christ's College, Harwood suddenly removed to Emmanuel where he got better rooms and a very extensive garden. But he kept up his connection with Christ's and generally, out of term time, dined there three or four days in the week. His evenings were however generally spent in Emmanuel parlour, which, under the presidency of Dr. Farmer, was always open to those who loved pipes, tobacco and cheerful conversation. Farmer patronised a watercolour painter called Harding and Harwood thought it would be worth his while to support him too. He requested all the members of the University with whom he was at all acquainted, of whatever age or station, to sit for their portraits. Few refused compliance for the charge was moderate, and the likenesses very striking. Then when they were completed Harwood had about six or eight placed in a frame, and hung in his room - in fact, the walls were nearly covered.

He bought a house adjoining his garden, in which he placed his man-servant and wife, where his dinners were usually dressed. During term time covers were daily laid for half-a-dozen, and the Professor in the course of his morning walk always contrived to pick up the requisite number of guests. A plain dinner was neatly served up at two o'clock; and as his lectures began at four, there was no great consumption of wine, and the guests, with scarcely an exception, accompanied him to the lectures, thus boosting the numbers and ensuring his reputation was even more enhanced. Harwood was at that time lecturing on comparative anatomy; and it was no unusual thing to see the turbot on which Mr. Orange, his Demonstrator in anatomy, had exercised his skill one day, carved by the Professor on the following.

But he did not get on with everybody. One day a furious quarrel broke out at Addenbrooke's Hospital between Harwood and Sir Isaac Pennington. Very high words ensued and as soon as Harwood reached home, he wrote a challenge to the knight, and sent it by an undergraduate of Trinity. But when Sir Isaac declined to open the letter the undergraduate posted off immediately to London, and the letter appeared in the national newspapers the following morning, with an account of the quarrel and the subsequent proceedings. The whole was a silly affair and Harwood did not acquire by his conduct on this occasion a character either for valour or discretion. And worse was to follow

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Sir Busick Harwood, Professor of Anatomy, was by all reports a wealthy man, enjoying a good lifestyle. He was distinguished in his field and attracted large numbers to his lectures. Yet he still found it necessary to emphasise to others just how excellent he was, as Gunning related.

"He approached one of his fellow-tutors with a concocted tale: 'The men of Peterhouse are resolved to give me a piece of plate, but not being men of business would probably make a very bungling affair of it. You would do me a very great favour if you would consent to be one of the Managing Committee'. Of course the chap agreed at once, and Harwood then used the same ploy on another of his friends. A committee was duly formed but they soon realised that unless they limited the sum to be subscribed by each individual many junior members of the University would vie with each other in the amount of their subscriptions. So a maximum of two guineas was agreed.

But then the committee received a letter enclosing a banknote for £50 begging 'that in his particular case this limit might be dispensed with, as he was under very great obligations to the Professor, and that he had no other means of evincing his gratitude'. The letter was signed 'A Member of the University', but it was shrewdly suspected that it had been written by Harwood himself. The committee determined not to violate the rule they had laid down: they retained two guineas, but there was a considerable debate as to what should be done with the remainder of the money. Several of them wanted to give it to some charitable institution, others disagreed. I have little doubt it was added to the plate fund, so Harwood contributed to his own present."

Colonel Wale interjected: "The man was a bounder, he became possessed of a most attractive young lady that I had hoped to call daughter".

Gunning was stunned – but just for a moment: "I remember when he made the announcement. I was dining in the hall of Christ's College, when Professor Harwood came in just as we had seated ourselves. Before he had well taken his seat, he said, 'I am going to do a devilish foolish thing' and immediately added, 'I am going to be married!' As he had always been in the habit of speaking of the marriage state in strong terms of reprobation, we were astonished at this declaration. After retiring to the Combination-room, he told us the name of the lady. It was a Miss Peschell, who had been engaged for some time to the elder son of a Mr. Wale, of Shelford but he said that by his death she was left at liberty to form another engagement. He was proceeding to eulogise the lady but his own diatribes against marriage were too fresh in the memory of all present, and the laugh against him became so hearty and. universal, that he left the party unusually early.

"A few days after, in conversing with a farmer at Ickleton (where I then resided), I got a little more insight into his plans than he had thought proper to open to the members of Christ's College. The farmer told me that he had just come from his brother's (a wealthy man in the neighbourhood of Newmarket), who was dangerously ill. Harwood attended him, and after leaving the sick-room, went to report to the brother the state of his patient. My informant (Thomas Chambers), like himself, was an inveterate smoker, and while the horses were getting ready, they each took a pipe, when the following conversation ensued:
Professor - 'I am going to do a d--d foolish thing; I am going to marry!'
Farmer - 'I dare say you do not think it so foolish a thing, for no doubt the lady has plenty of money'.
Professor -'She has not a great deal of that; but we are both of us great favourites with old Dr. Glynn, who has plenty, and no one to leave it to. It will be a devilish odd thing if we don't get a good deal of his cash'

The motive was now sufficiently apparent; and in pursuance of the plan, which had no doubt been concerted by this fond couple, the lady wrote to Dr. Glynn to the following effect.- 'That Professor Harwood had made her a proposal of marriage; that she could not but acknowledge that she thought
more highly of him than of any other man with whom she was acquainted; but that, in a matter of such great importance to her future happiness, she could not think of accepting his offer till she had asked the advice and received the approbation of so dear and kind a friend as he' The Doctor's reply was very laconic; he merely said that she was of an age to decide for herself, and that he hoped she would decide in such a way as to promote her future happiness. But he was persuaded to give the bride away when the couple married at St. Botolph's Church. And their ploy worked to an extent - at Dr. Glynn's death, in 1800, he left them a legacy of one hundred pounds each.

[illus 87.04]

Henry Gunning was now in full flow, drawing on his remarkable fund of reminiscences and recollections

“Dr Glynn was a man of great talent, and of the kindest and most benevolent disposition; but was very eccentric, and imbibed strong prejudices. Once he had to give evidence in a case of supposed murder; and in consequence of a severe cross-examination, he became so irritated that he waited until the Court broke up, and then threatened the learned counsel with personal chastisement unless he apologised. This attack would have been attended with serious consequences, if the Doctor had not yielded to the earnest entreaties of his friends, and withdrawn the offensive expressions.

“His character as a physician stood very high and he was in much repute at Ely; when there, numerous persons from the Fens (where ague and fevers abounded) came for his advice, which they always received gratuitously.

“On one occasion a poor woman attended, to consult him about her son, whom she described as too ill to be brought to him. The Doctor was so struck by the affecting manner in which the woman spoke of her boy, that he determined, on going to see him, although the roads at that period were almost impassable for a carriage. He took much interest in the lad, and ordered him to be supplied with bark and port-wine at his own expense; he visited him several times, and did not take his leave until the boy was thoroughly recovered.

“As he was seated in his room on the following Saturday, the mother of the lad entered, bringing with her a huge wicker-basket. The following dialogue, as nearly as I can recollect took place: ‘I hope, my good woman, your son is not ill again?’ ‘No, Sir; he was never better, but we can't get no rest for thinking of all the trouble you have had - and so my boy resolved this morning on sending you his favourite magpie’

“The Doctor then looked at the newcomer remarked that he was a noble fellow, and that he looked as bold as a lord. He then continued – ‘I am very thankful to your son, and very proud of his present but as I am a good deal from home, and my servant is a careless fellow, I am afraid he should forget to feed him. I must therefore request to have him kept for me, and I will allow a shilling a week for his board as long as he lives’. There was no demur to this arrangement, and the Doctor paid the first month in advance.

“Glyn's habits were very singular. He had no fixed hours for his meals, but ate whenever he felt hungry, and generally had a cold shoulder of mutton standing in his room. He accustomed himself to live as much as possible in the air, and towards the dusk of the evening would often walk under the new buildings of his college for an hour or two. I remember having returned from a day's shooting with a friend who had borrowed rooms there, and with whom I was engaged to dine. Being considerably after our time, I made a hasty toilet in his bedroom, and was soon succeeded by my friend, who finding that the bedmaker had neglected to furnish a second wash-basin, took, the one I had left, and hastily flung the contents out of the window.

“A growl ensued from beneath, and on looking out, he found to his horror that he had emptied it upon Dr. Glynn. He begged I would meet the Doctor (who was on his way upstairs), and make an explanation. I told him that, as he was the aggressor, he must fight his own battle. Just at this moment the Doctor entered in a woeful plight, and in great ire. My friend endeavoured to explain and to apologise, but for some minutes the Doctor was inexorable; he at last exclaimed in his characteristic manner, ‘The contents of a washbasin, did you say? Well, well - I feared it had been worse; but mind, my master, never to do the like again!’

“Dr Glynn died in February 1800, and was buried privately, by his express desire, in the Chapel. He left the bulk of his property to the College, after having provided amply for an old and faithful servant – and, somewhat less so for scheming Busick Harwood and his wife!”

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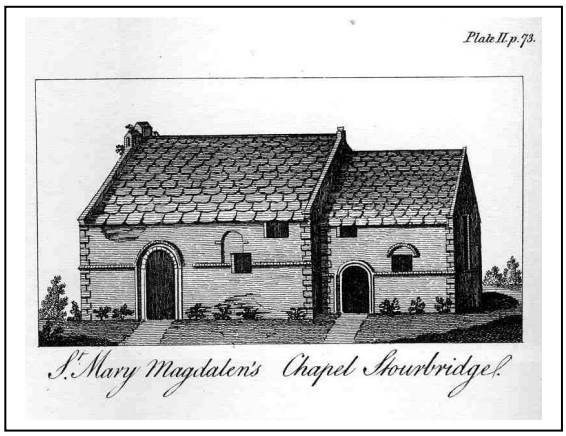
“Did you know Dr Yates”, enquired Gunning of no-one in particular, “low in stature, remarkably fat and with very short and thick legs – if you followed him in a procession he looked just like a turtle walking on his hind legs. He was Vice-Chancellor of the University about 40 years ago and, like other small, fat people, was very insistent on his dignity.

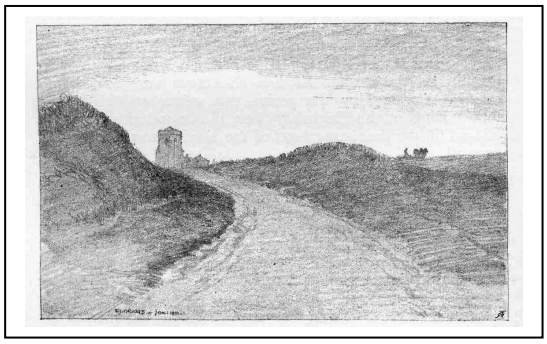
“Anyway one Sunday I received a very early message by the University Marshal to accompany the Vice-Chancellor to Burwell. The University is possessed of a considerable estate there, consisting of the glebe lands and the great tithes of the parish and they are also patrons of the Vicarage. So it has been the custom for many years for the Vice-Chancellor to preach a sermon at Burwell on Midlent Sunday, and to dine with the tenant.

“A very heavy snow had fallen the night previous, which made the journey one to remember. The road along Maids Causeway and Sun Street was treacherous, our progress past the darker parts of Barnwell one to be accomplished as soon as possible. But there are a couple of buildings worth seeing. One is the Leper Chapel, an old Norman building in sad need of repair but now Cotman has produced a sketch of it people have taken more interest in it. There’s usually somebody living there who will give you a look around, though it’s cluttered up with the stalls and paraphernalia for Stourbridge Fair and you can always get in during the Fair, because they use it as a beer house.



“Almost alongside is another building of great interest, especially to a man who writes books – one of the country’s few papermills. I do think it appropriate that a town that largely lives on paper should actually have manufactured its own, rather than rely on importing it – but this one has now been closed for over 200 years and has now been converted to a watermill.

“You will have to pause anyway to pay your toll at the Papermills Turnpike Gate but it’s worth it to have a nice new straight road rather that the old route towards Fen Ditton then along the top of an ancient dyke and across Quy water. You head towards Stow-cum-Quy church which is isolated on the edge of the village. There’s been no resident vicar since the 1680s, since it’s so near Cambridge that its handy for young men studying at the colleges to pop out and take a service. But no student would on take the living after Thomas Harrison, Professor of Hebrew died of smallpox and was buried there, so James Hicks, Squire of Great Wilbraham became incumbent. He’d drive over on a Sunday afternoon in an open phaeton with yellow wheels, drawn by a pair of grey horses and with a postilion in sky blue livery to look after them when he was preaching. Now it’s held by Rev Edward Ventris who walks over from Cambridge every Sunday – pausing for a glass of beer en route



“You get a glimpse of the new Quy Hall, an old building greatly extended in 1741 after the Squire, James Martin, got himself elected as Member of Parliament for Cambridge. He’d been a banker in Lombard Street, London till he retired and felt he needed more imposing rooms in which he could receive his constituents, so he added a couple of turrets and gave the front a parapet designed to make it look like a castle. Mind you all his new brickwork didn’t do him much good, he died aged 50, much afflicted with the stone. After this the place was rented out till his nephew, Thomas Martin moved in with his wife, illegitimate son and two daughters. There was great speculation as to who would inherit the estate when Thomas died in 1821, but its gone to his son by his second marriage.

“Apart from him, Quy is a poor village; 25 people received the Childrens Head Money in 1817 – that’s the allowance first paid at the end of the war against Napoleon when the price of bread soared and people couldn’t make ends meet. It’s been a hard time for everybody, including the parish officials and now Joseph Dobson himself has gone bankrupt. He had one of the biggest farms and one of the bigger families – six daughters in nine years. He was one of those men without whom the village would never function – overseer of the poor, surveyor of the roads, parish constable and a churchwarden eight times. Some say he spent too much time on his parish duties and not enough on his farming, but now he’s a broken man – receiving the relief he dispensed for so many years. They pay old men a few pence a week and given them casual jobs like impounding stray cattle, tolling the bell at harvest or bird scaring – jobs other parishes give to young boys.

You can see why the Quy residents get so excited when it’s time for Reach fair!

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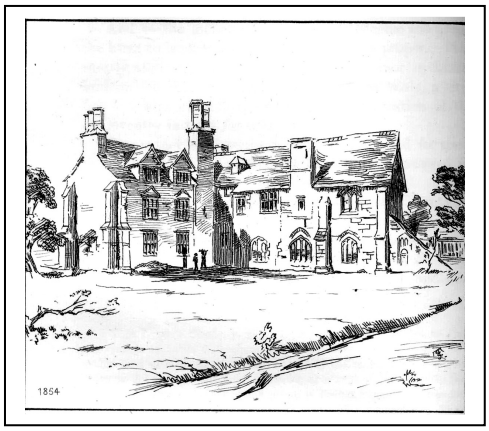
“You see”, Gunning continued, “there’s not much excitement in and around Quy during the year, and people will flock out of their cottages for a view of a ‘coach and four’. So the University journey to the Burwell sermon is – like the arrival of the Mayor before the fair – something they look forward to. The University Marshal, who was part of our entourage, always filled his pockets with halfpennies for the occasion and amused himself with throwing them into the snow, and we laughed heartily to see the countryfolk scamper for them.

“Young and middle-aged matrons joined in the jubilant scramble for copper. One good lady was particularly prepared and improvised a step dance – not yet seen on the stage - as a special inducement for coins to come her way, holding out her capacious white apron as a receptacle for our offerings. The village children wandered far up the road to meet our coach, which they welcomed with a shrill chant of ‘Please - sir - pray – sir’ and after picking up the money which fell to their lot, scuttled after us as fast as their small limbs would allow them in hopes of more.”

From the village of Quy the Vice Chancellor’s carriage was soon approaching the City of Lode - a jumble of cottages that surely had no right to such a dignity. But yokels argued that it was home to an Abbey, and if cathedral towns are always called cities, then why should not they be? Their own abbey – Anglesey priory - had never been a large institution and like others had been swept away at the dissolution of the monasteries in the 1530s. Such antiquity as it possessed was now but poorly preserved, a barn of wood and clunch surmounted by a thatched roof and sundry blocks of ancient stone some of which had been converted into a house.



Gunning was more interested in the recent owners than the building’s earlier history. Various folk had succeeded to the

estate, including Thomas Hobson the Cambridge carrier, Sir George Downing – though this was one bit of his fortune that the University never acquired - but it was the present owners, the Jenyns family, who fascinated Pickwick.

Soame Jenyns had been one of the last century's most celebrated poets and divines. His poetical pieces were admired but it was the reaction his essay on 'A Free Enquiry into the Nature and Origin of Evil' that had propelled him to prominence. Samuel Johnson himself, that great lexicographer, poet and critic had attacked the work in the Literary Magazine, claiming its author had ventured far beyond his depth. It took more than a quarter of a century for Soame to hit back but then, after the death of Johnson, he composed an epitaph

"Here lies poor Johnson. Reader have a care
Tread lightly, lest you rouse a sleeping bear
Religious, moral, generous and humane
He was – but self-sufficient, rude and vain
Ill-bred, and overbearing in dispute,
A scholar and a Christian – yet a brute"

James Boswell had replied on behalf of his dead friend, in a premature obituary for Soame, entitled "Epitaph prepared for a creature not quite dead yet"

"Here lies a little ugly nauseous elf
Who judging only from his wretched self,
Feebly attempted, petulant and vain,
The origin of evil to explain.
A mighty genius at this elf displeased,
With critic grasp the urchin squeezed.
For thirty years its coward spleen it kept,
Till in the dust the mighty genius slept;
Then stunk and fretted in expiring snuff,
And blinked at Johnson it its last poor puff."

Others had not shared Johnson's views for another of Soame's volumes "The Internal Evidence of the Christian Religion" achieved much success and became a textbook in the studies of the University of Cambridge. All this Pickwick knew, but what of the private life Soame had lived just along the road?

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So if Boswell considered Soame Jenyns a 'ugly nauseous elf' what did the good folk of his home village of Bottisham think about him? Gunning continued.

"Soame was the son of Sir Roger Jenyns of Bottisham and attended St John's College, as a fellow-commoner, But he left after three years to spend his summers at Bottisham and the winter in London where they say he was much given to nocturnal frolics, as most young men were at that day, and attended in disguise every execution at Tyburn.

"His father thought marriage a good prospect so early in life he was wed to his kinswoman, Mary Soame, an heiress from Dereham Grange in Norfolk by whom he received a great accession of fortune. When his father died in 1740 Soame and his wife took up his residence at Bottisham Hall, and though for some time all went well, the union was not a happy one. Mary made arrangements for a journey to take the waters at Bath, and never returned afterwards. She made an elopement, causing great scandal in rural Cambridgeshire where it was commonly reported that she had long been in secret alliance with her husband's friend, a

Leicestershire gentleman. However, after this a separation took place by mutual consent, and Soame allowed her an annuity up to the time of her death in 1753.

"Soame Jenyns did not retire into seclusion but kept up a state of great magnificence. People still talk, of the grand state room at Bottisham Hall with its velvet hangings, of the quantity of plate, of the great stone lions which guarded the entrance to the mansion and his handsome coach and four, which he used to drive into Cambridge

"Nor was he alone in the house, for his first cousin, a Miss Elizabeth Grey, had lived there almost from the first – in fact some people speculated that this might have been one reason his wife left him. At any rate within a year of Mary's death Soame married her in the old chapel of Somerset House. She was then 52 years of age, he 39, and they lived together for more than 30 years.

"In politics Soame was a Tory at first, though he veered round and became a Whig. In the General Election of 1742 he was elected to represent Cambridgeshire and held a seat in Parliament for 31 years, though he switched from the county to the borough of Cambridge with a short excursion to be MP for Dunwich in between. Through the patronage of Lord Hardwicke, of Wimpole Hall, he became a commissioner of the Board of Trade and Plantations and was commonly quoted as saying, 'That the East and West Indies were two great wings that would fly away with little Britain'.

"But it was who was to fly away with his estate that caused the greatest worries. Although twice married – and his second wife lived on to the ripe age of 94 – there was no heir so the property was handed down to another branch of the family. The present occupier is the Rev. George Leonard Jenyns who has also contrived to inherit Anglesey Abbey from Soame's first wife.

"Soame died in 1787 and was buried at Bottisham church in the middle of the night. Even on his death-bed he gloried in the belief that whatever Dr Johnson thought of it his little book on Christianity had been useful in reaching people who would not have understood deeper works. There's a memorial to him in the church, alongside that of his mother, over the top of which hang a streamer carrying the family coat of arms, helmet, gloves, mantle and sword. It's not as grand as that of the Allington family or the monument to their children which represents a curtain being drawn aside with the reclining figures of a boy and girl. The inscription reads:

Stay Passenger, and wonder whom these stones
Have learned to speak: two infant Allingtons:
These the world's strangers came not here to dwell;
They tasted, liked it not, and bad farewell:
Nature hath granted what they begged with tears:
As soon as they begun to end their years

But there are other memorials dotted around the churchyard: thirty-eight small wooden posts marked 'C'; they show where lie the bodies of villagers who perished in consequence of the dreadful visitation of cholera just four years ago, in 1834.

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From Lode the University carriage had continued on to Swaffham Bulbeck, which had been the scene of a suspected arson outbreak in the March of 1833, as Gunning related.

It was an interesting case which hinged on forensic evidence. At that time – as always – agriculture was in a poor way; farmer Charles Giblin had called his men together and told

them they must try to work for rather less as he must lower their wages a little until corn fetched a better price. Of course the labourers did not like it and there was an amount of muttering. Three of four days later he had gone to Cambridge and returned to find his barn on fire with his workmen fighting to put it out

William Pammenter – a name Pickwick recollected from his Linton adventure – told the court how he had been threshing in the barn with Bill Stigwood and his son who'd worked for Giblin for years. They'd started between six and seven that morning, and stopped for breakfast an hour later. They'd had another small break to get some mushrooms from the field at the back of the barn and then broke for bread and cheese about one o'clock. Then he'd left them to it and gone off to work on his own.

About ten minutes afterwards he heard the older man call out that the barn was on fire. When Pammenter got there Bill Stigwood was stood near a rat hole and was ranting about hearing a crack something like a gunshot that had come out of the hole which had set some barley stacks on fire. That didn't make sense, how could anybody get down a rat hole with a pistol and anyway nobody else had heard the gunshot. What's more there was nobody else about because the old farm dogs that barked at any stranger had stayed quiet. It all seemed very suspicious.

Then a couple of weeks later Stephen Warren, a Burwell farmer, was walking through Bulbeck when he picked up a piece of paper on the footpath. It read: "this is to ghive notts if you take the men of thir whas you may exspek som fires fore long giblin and chimbs lik wiss ebis your filds stiks for thay shill shouly be bunt if you dew".

A Lambeth-Street officer was sent for to investigate and as a result William Stigwood and his son, Henry were arrested and sent for trial. It really was a clear case of arson: he had a grievance – loss of wages, he was on the scene and known to like a pipe, so he would have had the means to strike a light. What's more William was an educated man – he sent his son to a night-school run by a village labourer called Fordham – and could even write himself. When the police examined his handwriting it was very similar to that on the note.

People in the village prepared themselves for a trip to Cambridge to watch a hanging – until the gardener, John Lawrence came forward. He was sweeping up the debris after the fire when in the corner of the barn he discovered a small phial which appeared to have had some combustible material put in it.

Isaiah Deck, the Cambridge chemist, was called to analyse it and asked by the Judge what was the longest time that combustibles would lie before they exploded. Deck refused to answer – at least in open court, which the Judge said was quite right: if he had done he would have made persons acquainted with what they ought not to know. But Deck said he could very easily prepare some combustibles that would remain for some days, or more than a week, before it exploded.

This really undermined the prosecution's case. It was right that the men should have been tried but when men's lives were concerned there had to be more conclusive proof. It was clear that the size of the rat hole was sufficiently large for almost anyone to put their hand into it and the phial and its contents could have laid there for a week or more. Anybody could have put them there. Father and son were discharged.

But somebody had set fire to the barn, and not just to that one, there were others in the area as well. As the Judge said there was a spirit of resentment against farmers who lowered wages but if the farmers' property was destroyed then how could they pay their servants at all, and if the farmers were insured then it inflicted no real injury upon them. Except that the insurance rates would rise and prove another burden to farmers unable to pay their way.

Ch 15th March 1833

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Charles Giblin of Swaffham Bulbeck had suffered loss by fire – but he made profit from water. In partnership with his brother, Henry he'd acquired Thomas Bowyer' mercantile business in Commercial End, which had flourished for nearly 250 years.

Cambridgeshire was the centre of a great grain-growing region. But it was one thing to grow crops, another to market them, especially as the roads were so bad. Thomas Bowyer had travelled throughout East Anglia buying barley and wheat, and arranging for it to be transported to Bulbeck. There he milled it at his own mills - he had two watermills at Swaffham and Lode, rented another at Bottisham Park and also had various windmills. They were all in good condition, indeed the New Mill had been rebuilt with five floors in 1830.

But the heart of Bowyer's empire was export and import and the river was his highway. He built up his own fleet of barges to carry goods from the quay at the back of his premises, down Swaffham Lode to the Cam and then to the port of King's Lynn. From there it was shipped to Liverpool or Newcastle and on through Rotterdam to the German markets on boats like 'The Thomas' newly built in 1824 & named after himself.

Nor were the exports just agricultural; building materials such as bricks, tiles and slates were carried down river as they had been for centuries. Incoming barges brought in coal from the Tyne, salt, timber and Baltic iron in addition to luxuries such as wine, soap and candles which were distributed amongst the local gentry and shopkeepers

To sustain and improve trade Bowyer embarked on a major building project. He built Granaries adjoining the river to contain 3,000 quarters of corn, along with Maltings and wine vaults stocked with superior foreign wines and spirits of every description.

He built substantial grey brick slated two-storey houses for his millers, senior staff and clerks. His workmen were housed in blocks of timber-framed dwellings, with one room downstairs and a ladder leading to a bedroom beneath the pantiled roof. Although built to a standard design their plastered walls were inscribed with masonry outlines to look like brick and each had gardens and outhouses. Nor did he neglect his men's need to spend the money they had earned, so he built a new public house called the White Lion.

There was a blacksmith's shop, lime kiln, warehouses, barns, threshing machines, coach-houses and stabling for 50 working horses, beside an excellent range of stabling for 60 horses for the accommodation of customers. Commanding a full view of all of this was the Counting House where Thomas – and now Charles Gilpin - counted all his money.

But there was a challenge to that prosperity – pirates, or at least a gang of desperate cut-throats who lived in an isolated house, just across the fen at the junction of the Reach and Burwell Lodes. It rejoiced in the name of Pout Hall and, some said, had been established centuries before by a monk from Spinney Abbey and a nun from Denny who had been banished after their contemplation had been less of religious matters and more of the joys of the flesh.

Now it was home to a gang of thieves and scoundrels who lurked about the fen at all times of day and night seeking what they could plunder. Sheep-stealing, fowl-stealing, tool-stealing and every other kind of lawlessness were carried on, especially at harvest-time. Then four of the villains formed a gang, one taking a sail-cloth, thieved from one of the fen drainage windmills, another a pole, the third a pitchfork and the fourth some sacks. The cloth was

spread out in the cornfield, one man took a sheaf from a shock with his pitchfork and held it over the cloth where the man with the pole beat it. The corn was gathered into a sack and carried back to Pout Hall. Once they'd got as much corn as they wanted it would be loaded onto a boat and carried along the lode to a wharf belonging to a house in North Street, Burwell. There it was hidden in an underground granary until it was time for it to be disposed of – one small part of the export trade not controlled by the Giblins.

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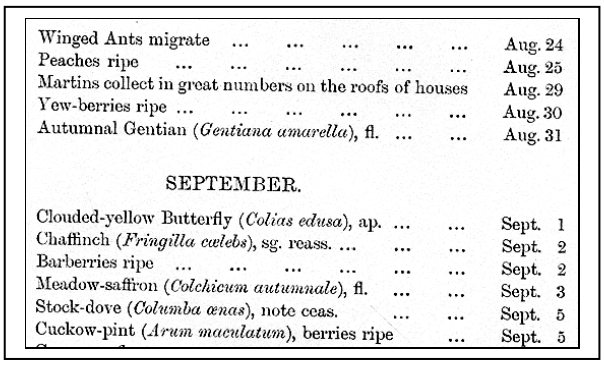
It was not just commodities that were brought into the Commercial End at Swaffham Bulbeck; such an extensive enterprise demanded manpower and the influx of strangers inevitably added to the difficulties being experienced by other villagers. But none of this bothered the vicar – for there was no vicar, at least not until another of the Jenyns family had arrived on the scene.

Leonard Jenyns, who preferred to call himself Blomefield, was son of the master of Bottisham Hall and a remarkable lad in his own way. He'd been passionately fond of botany and natural history – in fact some said he'd had the chance to take the voyage on The Beagle that had gone to Charles Darwin. But instead of charting the flora and fauna of foreign climes he had concentrated on that of Swaffham Bulbeck, taking twice-daily observations using the very best instruments and gaining a reputation as a bit of an eccentric. When the fenland fogs formed on the large grass meadow in front of the vicarage he would be seen outside sitting at a small table jotting down notes until it lifted – sometimes all night. He recorded month by month the arrival of swallows, the singing of the greenfich and the migration of winged ants as well as the ripening of his snowberries, peaches and Jargonelle pears.



Winged Ants migrate	Aug. 24
Peaches ripe	Aug. 25
Martins collect in great numbers on the roofs of houses	Aug. 29
Yew-berries ripe	Aug. 30
Autumnal Gentian (*Gentiana amarella*), fl.	Aug. 31
SEPTEMBER.	
Clouded-yellow Butterfly (*Colias edusa*), ap.	Sept. 1
Chaffinch (*Fringilla cœlebs*), sg. reass.	Sept. 2
Barberries ripe	Sept. 2
Meadow-saffron (*Colchicum autumnale*), fl.	Sept. 3
Stock-dove (*Columba œnas*), note ceas.	Sept. 5
Cuckow-pint (*Arum maculatum*), berries ripe ...	Sept. 5

Everybody was surprised when he got the appointment for he was the first resident clergyman the parish had ever known, as he'd told Wale

"I was 23 when I was ordained curate to the vicar of Bulbeck; he kept a school in the neighbourhood of Wisbech and had never been in the village since the day he read himself in. He gave me the appointment without any interview and I never saw him until years afterwards. I was curate five years before the vicar resigned and the Bishop of Ely, Sparke, gave me the living in his place. There was not much money attached to the position but it was near my family home at Bottisham so it suited me well.

"Previously fellows of colleges had undertaken Sunday services and the parish was left to itself the rest of the week. This had led to great neglect and religion was more a matter of form than anything else. There was not a very bad congregation on Sundays but scarcely any show of reverence on the part of those who attended the service. The problem was the young men and boys who generally sat together on the short benches under the north wall. So I decided that immediately I noticed any laughing or talking I would come to a dead stop whatever I was doing, whether reading prayers or preaching, and fix my eyes on the offender. The rest of the congregation noticing this immediately turned their eyes also towards the same party who was thus shamed without a word spoken

“There was always some merriment during a marriage with a few idle lookers-on disposed to joke or laugh at the couple about to be united. But on one occasion it was the bride and groom who misbehaved. I first saw it on their coming up to the rails of the communion table and cautioned them on the subject. But soon after commencing the service I had to speak to them again – and for a third time told them I should stop the ceremony. They would not take notice so I carried on for a short time and then shut the book, opened the gate in the rails and walked straight back to the vestry, saying nothing. And there I waited for a few minutes leaving the couple and their friends to reflect on their folly. In a short time the clerk came to the vestry on behalf of the couple to say they were extremely sorry and would I return and finish the service.

“On other occasions it was the Bishop who was the cause of the problem. One Bishop decided that instead of conducting several Confirmation services it would be better to bring a large number of parishes together so that he could deal with a whole railful of candidates at one time. This resulted in confusion and disorder. A large number of children were brought in by open wagons at slow pace from such distances that they had to start at 6am or earlier in order to arrive in time. When they got to church they were tired and weary, hungry and wanting food and when all packed together in a large pew like sheep in a pen scenes unmentionable were present. The disorder was so great I was never able to get near my own flock during the whole service and at the close was almost in despair, not knowing whether they had been confirmed or not”.

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Leonard Jenyns – or the Rev Blomefield as he preferred to be known – encountered a variety of problems as he set about transforming his parish of Swaffham Bulbeck:
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“I effected a change in the times for baptisms, conducting them after the second lesson in the afternoon service on a particular Sunday in the month. When the day came round and I entered the church I found almost a full congregation, attentive and well-behaved in every respect. The second lesson being over I proceeded to the font to baptise the children that had been bought and read the service as impressively as I could; the result was most successful all opposition ceased and the baptism services I could reckon on having a full church and attentive congregation.

“As time went on things improved further. There was no regular Meeting House in the parish; there were some dissenters but not many, and several of them became amongst the steadiest and best-behaved of my parishioners. I sometimes even saw the dissenting minister himself who at times held forth in one of the cottages to the few that came to listen to him

But it was not just religious ceremonies that were conducted in church: “There was a profaning of the building even on the part of the churchwardens themselves. There being no regular vestry, parish meetings were held mostly in the chancel and often the communion table was used on which to lay the books and settle the accounts, while some of the farmers lolled upon the rails, their hats on their heads”.

Outside more abominable practices were carried on: “Once I actually saw the churchyard being used as a knacker’s yard. A dead cow had been suspended by the heels against the west tower of the church and was in process of being cut up – the butcher was most upset when I intervened.

“The school too was most unsatisfactory. There were only a few quite young children, the schoolmaster’s wife teaching and looking after them while the master himself, a careless and

unprincipled man, idled about the streets, doing little or nothing – perhaps in the public house. It was a charity school sponsored by a benevolent lady, Mrs Towers, a generation or two back, who left a sum of money to build a house for the master with a school-room forming part of it. The vicar or curate of those days, Mr Hill had attempted to carry out the directions in her will but when I came the inefficient master had possession of the house and refused to give it up. Nothing was to be done. I asked for the title deeds, about which nobody knew anything about. I had to ferret them out and it took months and months before I could discover where they had been deposited in Emmanuel College library

"I was there one day, covered in the dust of ages, when there came a messenger to inform me that the schoolmaster – who from his habits was often out of pocket and glad to do a day's work if he could get it - had been digging in a clunch pit when a mass of chalk had fallen down and killed him. I hastened to his house where he had just been brought in and laid upon the bed utterly unconscious. I remained with him a few days until he died. After the funeral the widow persisted in retaining the house for a considerable time but in the end, overawed by a lawyer and his officials she consented to retire from the struggle and passed it over the vicar and churchwardens. I appointed a new schoolmaster, reserving the whole house as a residence for the master I caused a new school room to be erected close adjoining the house and gradually got together a fair school increasing in numbers yearly".

And in addition to all this there was the fabric of the church itself which was in dire need of repair. Blomefield did much of the work himself. "Once I was in the roof replacing some rafters which were rotten with age, scraping off the coat of whitewash which had been laid on year after year and quite concealed some of the more decorative features of the building when the archdeacon appeared. I suspect one of the churchwardens had reported me for undertaking changes without permission, but he seemed satisfied and said little"

But at least Leonard Blomefield only had one church to worry about – the next rector had two!

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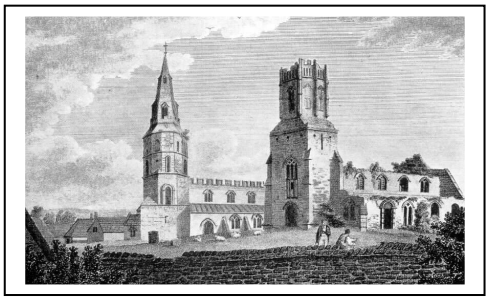
A few years ago the church-going folk of Swaffham Prior had been afraid to go to church even though they had two to chose from. Originally there had been two separate parishes, each with its minister but the livings were combined in the 1660s when the benefit of a joint income made it a much-sought-after benefice. It was now held by George Leonard Jenyns of Bottisham Hall - Blomefield's father.

There was a long-running dispute over which was the older building. Some said that the church of St Cyriac and St Julitta had been established before the Norman Conquest, and certainly it stood higher and more centrally in the joint churchyard. But St Mary's had been the more important church in the Middle Ages and baptised double the number of children. Both looked alike, each with an octagonal west tower, but St Mary's once had a tower.

By the 1780s St Cyriac's church was in such a bad condition that it was decided to abandon it, soon the roof had collapsed and the walls were overgrown with ivy. It didn't matter much, they had a spare church just next door.



The only problem was that St Mary's was also dangerous. It had been struck by lightning during a storm in 1779 and now the tower was bulging and cracked. Villagers feared the spire would crash down during the service and parson and people would be trapped in the rubble. There was nothing for it - it would

have to come off. They called in local builders who clattered and battered and after great effort managed to remove the spire, but in the process they left the top of the tower shattered and the porch damaged by falling masonry. Only then did they realise that the crack was simply the outside casing giving way: the expense and the loss of such a splendid spire had been for nothing. By then St Mary's was so mutilated that it was decided to abandon worship there and switch back to the first church.

But St Cyriac's was now in such a bad condition that it was cheaper to knock down everything except the tower and build a new church attached to it. Charles Humfrey, the Cambridge builder and banker was called in and began advertising for bricklayers who could undertake the work. The old materials were sold off and in May 1806 John Peter Allix, Lord of some of the Manors, laid the first stone in the rebuilding. Work proceeded well though the locals wondered just when all the alterations were going to be finished and the village returned to tranquillity.

By 1809 the new church was finished and dedicated. But the problems were not over. The village elders disputed the building costs and Charles Humfrey twice took them to court over nonpayment of his bills. Then they were sued by the stonemasons involved. It was not as if they liked what they'd got, the result being described as a 'grotesque travesty of a church, standing where once was a beautiful one'.

But now at least they had a usable church, and had no need for another. It was decided to pull down St Mary's and sell off the stone to help meet the building costs. Once more the demolition men moved in and soon the south aisle was a pile of rubble. But then Mrs Sarah Allix stepped in to buy the ruins of the church for preservation as a family burial place.

So now there were still two churches in one churchyard, one public, one private; one restored, one crumbling. And heaven knows what the future would bring.

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Services at whatever church happened to be in favour at Swaffham Prior would be enlivened by the presence of William Feakes, variously parish constable, ratchatcher, gamekeeper, leader of the church choir and maintainer of order during divine service. He had a grand, strident voice and sang through his nose to the accompaniment of a hand organ. But he never sang the third line of any verse, his explanation being that third lines ought to be sung 'pianiser' and that he was reserving himself to come in at the last line with the 'forty' During prayers his seat was in the gallery and from that elevated position he, with a cane sixteen feet long, corrected the boys in the body of the church. But when the sermon began he descended from the gallery and look up his position, armed with a shorter cane, against a pillar near the boys. When the vicar came to the second or third part of his discourse the solemn words were inevitably interrupted by a crash, indicating that he had struck at a disorderly youth, that the young man had ducked his head just in time, and that the stick had come into violent contact with the back of the seat.

The clerk also kept a stick in his pew and every now and then dashed out with it, so that the church was never dull; and even at the afternoon service in hot weather it was possible to keep awake. Not that many did and sermons were often interrupted by manly snores. Of course Mr Feakes did not venture to insult the men in the congregation, but when he noticed one of them asleep he shook the tired one gently and in a stage whisper in his ear said, "Wake up! Wake up!, the minister is just coming to the best part".

He used to say he'd been 'consulted' (insulted) by every gymnation boy in the parish. But he had decided views on education: "What have the boys taught to write? Do you want to have them hung for forgery?" He also had particular views too on matrimony; he'd approached one young lady with the line: "I have called, miss, to tell you that I am going to be married next Thursday week and that if you won't have me there's somebody else as will". Once he'd set his sights on a wealthy widow-woman and was heard to exclaim: "I don't know as I care much about the woman, but I should never forgive myself if I let my feelings stand between me and her hundred and fifty pounds". On another occasion he had been most attracted by a young woman who'd got herself a job as a cook. It seemed settled, for she reciprocated his affections, but he broke off the engagement when she found another job: "I always court the cook up at Squire's, and allus means to. If she chooses to give up the place, then I give her up. T'aint the girl I goo for, but the cook".

But many another man was similarly cunning. The vicar was once sent a haunch of venison: "Now if I have that cooked in my house, I shall have to ask a dozen neighbours in to eat it, and they will drink at least a dozen of wine. No. I will send the venison with my compliments to Mr Giblin at Swaffham Bulbeck and he will invite his friends, and will include me in the list of guests, and he will put plenty of fine old port at the table".

Giblin too was known for his forthright ways; he said of one farmer: "He came up to me, sir, and thrust his sample of barley in my face. He never asked how I was, and never inquired as to the health of Mrs Giblin or my family. I would not buy his barley, sir, if he offered it to me a five shillings a quarter under the market price". One of Giblin's sons found himself in court after he shot 'Long Tom' of Barnwell in the backside, pursued him and handed him over to the police. At the trial the judge asked him: "Do you mean to tell me that you deliberately shot at this man when he was outside your house". Giblin replied: "Well, my lord, I didn't wait until he got inside and stole my money and frightened my wife to death". The judge was appalled: "H'm, then I think you should be tried and not the prisoner" and advised the jury to find 'Not Guilty', which they did with some misgiving.

When Giblin left the court he found the rascal grinning at him. Standing on the steps of Shire Hall he addressed the crowd: "Well I listened to all the Lord Judge had to say and I beg to give you all notice that the second barrel of my blunderbuss is loaded, and that any one who comes down my yard at night will find that I can shoot as straight as I did at Long Tom". And the farmers gave him a loud cheer. "Since then I've had no burglars round my house at night, and I'm certain that a charge of buckshot is better than all the judges and juries and police to keep rascals from disturbing the sleep of honest men" he opined.

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Henry Gunning continued to regale his listeners with tales of the villages en route from Cambridge to Burwell, and now diverted towards the Kingdom of Reach.

Reach is a mysterious village with a long uncertain history, some say it was a city when Cambridge was still a small village somewhere in the backwaters, and that this was the site of the first successful Roman invasion of Britain

Pickwick expressed some doubts on this matter, but Gunning continued – certainly there had been a Roman road and paved streets, for some of these were still to be seen. And beneath the peat had be found a Roman settlement, with a blacksmith's shop complete with horseshoes and all the tools such a man needed. There was a villa with an elaborate hypocaust system, providing warmth to combat the damp fenland fogs and keep its Roman officer comfortable.

The Romans had improved and maintained the waterways that they used to export grain long before the merchant of Swaffham Bulbeck was ever on the scene. Indeed sea-going ships had

traded up to Reach until the drainage of the fens in the 1600s, carrying away the stone used for Ely cathedral and many a Cambridge college which was quarried from the village pits.

But with the collapse of Roman power the area had been plunged into chaos. Various tribes competed for territory and Reach found itself in the front line. Somebody had decided to emulate Hadrian and build a wall – but a wall made of earth – across the wide sweep of open country between its impenetrable fen & the forests at Wood Ditton. Perhaps it had been the Romans as a last attempt to contain some Saxon revolt, perhaps it had indeed been the Devil himself, as locals still believed – dug in a single night. It may have proved an impediment to William the Conqueror – who some said made his successful invasion of England after landing at Reach and mooring his boats alongside the ditch. Certainly he had been there for did he not burnt Burwell in his effort to subdue the rebel Hereward who had taken sanctuary on the Island of Ely. Other traditions told how he also destroyed a great Anglo Saxon cathedral on the site, as important as that at Soham, but to mark the site's religious importance not one but five – or was it seven – churches were later built to replace it.

Gunning had researched its story: he had discovered that by 1349 Reach had been administered by one Count Allen who had rights over a wide area, including seven churches. After that history was silent - perhaps it was true that the records had later been deliberately falsified by scholars anxious to disguise its true importance & Hastings had been substituted for Reach.

Even today the ditch formed a barrier making transport from Cambridge towards Burwell and into Norfolk difficult, though now there were one or two gaps cut through the great bank where the ditch in front had been filled in. And near to Reach itself the entire bank had been flattened to form a fairground.

Of this history was more confident. Reach's fair was there by 960 when the Bishop of Ely had granted permission for tumblers to entertain those attending to trade. Over a century later King John had issued a charter in 1200 which granted the burgesses of Cambridge various privileges, including a fair in Rogation Week - and it was still opened by the Mayor of Cambridge and his retinue. It was a sight to behold, the dignitaries arriving at noon, dressed in their civic costume, to intone the ancient declaration on fair green and at the Hythe and throw coins to the locals and yokels who flocked to watch.

Some money of theirs would be spent in another annual tradition – a haircut, whether they needed it or not, and out would come pots of various dimensions which were placed on the head to give the barber some guidance as to where to cut. Other carefully saved coins would find their way into the hands of the gingerbread man who moulded his wares into the shape of a man or woman, with a square piece of gold leaf for a face. This was a reflection of an ancient tradition when before the dawn of history a young maiden or youth was made a god and set apart for sacrifice. On the appointed day the body was anointed with oil and covered thickly with gold dust before being slain, cooked and eaten at some great festival. But now there was another tradition for any maiden who could not make up her mind whether to accept a suitable offer of marriage would be encouraged to visit Reach fair and buy a gingerbread husband – one she could eat if he didn't please her.

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Though gingerbread men sellers were an important part of the Reach fair they were eclipsed by horses. From around the region people brought ponies, mules, asses and beasts of all descriptions. Lines of ropes extended for a quarter of a mile down the road alongside the Devil's Ditch and to these the sale animals were attached, heavy horses nestling along half-breeds and droves of Welsh ponies.

Another line of poles was erected for the hundreds of horses bringing farmers, merchants and gentry to take part in the hustle and bustle. But as the day wore on so some vendors seemed unable to appreciate the difference between which horses were actually for sale and which were not. Disputes were frequent when an owner saw somebody else on his horse's back, a man who had just bought the animal, fair and square from … now just who was it, that man who'd just popped off with the money and was going to return with a receipt! There was no doubt, now that horse stealing no longer carried the death penalty there was bound to be more of that thievery

And what of that case a couple of years ago – the chap admitted taking the horses, but not stealing it.

The theft was an audacious one: a solicitor's clerk had been riding along the Newmarket Road when he'd stopped to chat with a client and tied the horse to the gate. No sooner had he turned his back when William Lowden came along, cool as you like, unhitched the horse and rode off back towards Cambridge. Before he could proceed far his hat blew off, but he continued his course. He passed through the Papermills Turnpike Gate – but in his hurry 'forgot' to pay the toll, then made a circuit through Cambridge and left at the Huntingdon turnpike, where having had the gate opened for him he again neglected to cash up and galloped through. But the turnpike keeper was having none of that – he dashed after him and caught up a short distance down the road. Of course Lowden was found guilty – they'd got him, the horse and his hat. But he wasn't hanged – no he was just transported to Australia for life!

There was no shortage of horses at Reach Fair, no shortage of traders, but nonetheless it was in danger of closure. For the expense of collecting the tolls was greater than the money they brought in. Even back in 1831 when the Mayor, Ald Cotton, was attempting to diminish the corrupt spending of other Mayors, the sums had not added up. The tolls received from the fair were that year £2.11s.6d. But the expenses of collecting them were £4.1s.0, then there was the money laid out for the entertainment of the mayoral party - £21.13.7 for refreshments, £1.15.0 for meat and 8s. for pigeons; all of that meant income £2.11.6, expense £27.17.7. – and that did not cover the hire of the mayoral carriage which seemed to vary from £11 to £40 depending on which mayor hired what from his particular friend's livery stable.

Not that Gunning could criticise the town authorities on such matters, for his own trip to Burwell, as part of the Vice Chancellor's annual expedition for the University sermon was hardly one of frugality!

He continued to relate their journey: "When we arrived at the Devil's Ditch, two strong carthorses and their driver (belonging to the tenant) were in waiting, and we had several spare traces in the carriage. At this point we quitted the road altogether, and went across the ploughed lands. There was no longer any dancer of overturning, but the six horses were obliged to exert themselves to the utmost to keep the carriage in motion. At length we arrived at the Vicarage, where we stopped and had some refreshment; and then proceeded to the church, a very noble edifice, and filled almost to suffocation by persons who had come (notwithstanding the badness of the day) to see a Vice-Chancellor.

"The condition of the church fabric leaves much to be desired; there are a number of interesting monuments, several to the Russell Family and the Isaacsons, but the most imposing is the handsome altar tomb to Lee Cotton, showing him in armour reclining alongside the altar. The inscription is in Latin, which I translate as:

Lee testifies that Cotton is content
To be interred under this monument :

The poor he first doth feed, and next by his will
With food the little ones doth fill :
Since piety cannot within them flow
Till will with learning and good manners grow

"And reading this reminded me of just how peckish I was becoming. Fortunately we did not have long to wait."

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The service in Burwell church had seemed to drag, Gunning confessed, until finally it was over.

"After the sermon", he continued, "we proceeded to the old Manor House, situated about three-quarters of a mile from the church, and on the very edge of the Fens. We were the guests of the tenant, Mr Salisbury Dunn, a wealthy man but somewhat peculiar and proud of his possessions. He would remark to his friends that 'one day the big bell with be tolled, and people will say, 'Dear me, there passes a man worth one hundred thousand pounds'. And so it happened for he had a large family of three sons and seven daughters and at his death he left them £10,000 each. But the sons turned out to be unsuccessful and the money so lovingly acquired was soon dissipated"

However Dunn did not stint his hospitality to the University party: "We were conducted into a small parlour, and in a few minutes were told that dinner was on the table. The repast was of the most ample description; three huge fowls were at the top of the table; at the bottom was an enormous sirloin of beef; on one side, a huge ham of excellent flavour; on the other side, a pigeon-pie; and in the centre, an unusually large plum-pudding." The food was well cooked, the beer was excellent; after dinner wine was introduced & the port was as good as ever was tasted, the tenant circulating the bottle very briskly. Conversation flowed and tales were told of the area and its characters.

On the edge of the fen, Goose Hall was a four-roomed dwelling-house, occupied by a man who kept a large number of geese and ducks, which fed on the common grass ground round about. A little way further down the drove was pit from which clay was extracted to repair the dykes and alongside was a row of six cottages constructed of wattle and daub, with rather primitive chimneys, and thatched with sedge and litter. They were built by squatters, typical Fenmen, rather tall and big, with very black hair, sallow and swarthy complexions, rough in their manners, gruff in speech, tenacious and cunning, independent and lawless. They lived chiefly by fishing and fowling, though in summer they helped in the harvest a little, dug a few turfs, and cut a little sedge.

At either end of the row dwell two women. In the most northerly hut lives all alone an old hag named Judy Finch. She has a very bad character, and a vile reputation for dark deeds relative to maternity affairs. She practiced occult necromancy and preyed on the queer superstitions that prevail among the Fen people. If there is any devilry going on in the parish Judy Finch is sure to be in it and many consider her an 'Old Witch'. The villagers sing a tale of her activities, part of which goes:

A wicked old crone,
Who lived all alone
In a hut beside of the reeds,
With a high-crowned hat
And a black tom-cat,
Whose looks were as bad as her deeds.

But strange to relate, at the other end of this row of cottages is quite an opposite character - Mrs. Jarvis, a lady noted for her good acts and full of kindliness. A woman of a cheerful disposition, scrupulously clean in her person and dress, very thrifty, clever, and kindly disposed, she is at the beck and call of all in distress. Her garden is full of herbs and she uses both wild and garden plants for her cures, with salves of ground ivy, and plasters of white lily petals. Her cupboards are full of physic and 'rubbing stuffs' which she administers with confidence and sympathy to the great comfort of the whole community. She keeps a few fowls, as she says, 'to have an egg by her', which is always forthcoming in a sick friend's need. She lends a willing hand in maternity cases, and is always ready to advise and assist in all illnesses. Although a Wesleyan by choice she attends church on Christmas Day, Good Friday and on Feast Sunday. So whereas Judy is regarded as an old witch, Mrs Jarvis is seen as a good wise woman.

It would be interesting to know which of the two would be remembered the longest, speculated Pickwick

[SCAN ATTACHED OF BURWELL FEN SHOWING GEESE AND TWO WOMEN]

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At Burwell Manor House the gossip flowed. There were five or six large families in the village, many of them with the same Christian name, and in order to distinguish one person from another a sobriquet had to be used denoting the business or peculiarity of each.

A century earlier a wealthy stockbroker had left a million pounds in his will to be divided between his second-cousins, Casburn by name, living in Burwell and the district. Some made good use of the windfall, others squandered it. Robert Casburn, nicknamed 'Fenner Bob' was a dealer in Fen merchandise such as turf, sedge, litter, and reed. Regarding himself a philosopher, he forsook his old trade and instead studied astronomy, discoursing on the celestial bodies. However Jonathan Casburn, alias 'Old Desperate', hired a post-chaise when he got his legacy, attached to himself a fiddler and two ladies of unsavoury morals and toured the country until he had exhausted his fortune, and confirmed his 'Desperate' nickname. Then there was William 'Cacker' Casburn who was chief clerk to a merchant in the village. A tall, thin man, with very pronounced features, he had long dark hair and whiskers and a wore a solemn countenance & a long black frock-coat. He gave out the hymns at the chapel, where he was a deacon and his vocabulary consisted in a stock of ponderous dictionary words and Biblical phrases, such as 'peradventure' and 'it came to pass'

Then there was George Peachey, known as 'Jingling George' from his soliloquising on all occasions; he'd come down in the world through too much conviviality and was not to be confused with another George Peachey, known as 'Swallow Pudding' reflecting his fondness for the pleasures of the table - he once said that if he was buried in a ton of pudding he could eat his way out of it.

But burial of another sort had recently stunned the parish; one working man who had five children and was earning only a few shillings a week, had suffered the agony of the death of one of his children. He had no money for a funeral and he applied to the Guardians of the Poor for money for a coffin. This was refused, he was told it would have to be a pauper funeral. But the man had his pride and promptly began to dig a grave in his own garden. Now this garden and that of the Guardian, who was a very prosperous farmer, were in close proximity. That gentleman did not relish that his vegetables might be fertilised by the mortal remains of the pauper child, so he sent a strong message to the man to desist from grave-digging in his garden, and to say that the child should be buried by the parish after all!

Nor were even the most important in the parish without fault; Parson James Johnson Baines was a friend of the local nobility and a graduate of Christ's, Cambridge – Gunning's own college. He was a tall, big man with strong features, a hooked nose and striking personality who belonged to the High and Dry Church party, but despite his hauteur he was ever kind and courteous.

He maintained good relations with most of his parishioners, including Mike Bailey who kept a little school in a small house on Pound Hill, and was also postmaster and a sort of town clerk. As he could write, when most could not, he did all the correspondence of the village; his house became the centre for news both private, public and political. The Reverend Baines called most mornings to hear the latest information and evil-disposed persons dubbed Bailey's house as 'Parson Baines's Gossiping Shop'

Yet only last year the gossip had been all about Parson Baines himself and the village charities. The quarterly meetings were seldom held, the accounts were not properly kept, and no one could find out how the money was dispensed, except that Mr. Baines subscribed twenty pounds out of the Charity money to Addenbrooke's Hospital in his own name, which made him a Life Governor. The parish did not approve of this and a public inquiry was held at Cambridge before a Charity Commissioner.

It was disclosed that Rev. Baines had put public money into the bank to his own private account, amounting in some years to four or five hundred pounds; but he declared that no interest had ever been given, nor had his own account benefited in any way. It was also suspected that Mike Bailey had been instructed to cook the accounts for the occasion. This was confirmed after the Commissioner held up a page of one of the books to the light and said, "This is odd. There are sums entered as put down in 1820 but the watermark on the paper shows it was not made until 1836!" Upon this Mr. Baines fainted in court. But it was universally agreed that the Parson was not a dishonest man, nor did he wish to defraud; he'd just got it into his head that the Charity money was safer in his private account at the bank where he could look after it properly.

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The conversation paused as each contemplated the unfortunate experience of Dr Baines of Burwell. It had been the talk of the neighbourhood, not least at Wicken just across the fen, where the village shop was the meeting place for all:

Hither the dames and lassies come
Whene'er they find it dull at home,
Make a pretence of buying pins
To blab abroad their neighbours' sins;
Or plead they want a farthing candle,
When all they want is downright scandal.

Wicken, a most isolated village had been virtually abandoned as far as the established church was concerned. There was no vicarage or residence for the clergyman so the poor curate generally lodged at Soham, four miles distant by the public road, for although there was a shorter route across the fields this was virtually impassable in winter.

There was never more than one church service on Sundays – morning service one week and afternoon service the next – but not infrequently no minister came at all and people made their journey to St Laurence's church only to return with their prayer-books unopened and

their minds unedified. Some of the disappointed congregation made wrathful remarks, referring to the clergyman's preference for spirituous liquors rather than the Holy Spirit, but others shrugged their shoulders, buried their prejudices and took themselves to the Wesleyan Chapel instead where they received a warm, if knowing welcome.

But Wicken had never been an easy place in which to minister the gospel. Way back in the 1200s Spinney priory had been founded on a spit of land bounded on one side by the broad expanse of Soham mere and on the other by the stinking, damp fenland. This was perhaps just too isolated a spot even for religious men as the small community of one prior and five canons was not a happy one. Things came to a head in May 1403 when the prior was stabbed in the priory church by two of his own monks; he staggered, bleeding, into the hall and locked himself in. But this could not save him, his assailants, reinforced by a third member of the religious fraternity, battered down the door and finished him off.

Somehow a new community re-established themselves in those isolated building, the floors still stained with blood and the cellars in which the attackers had been chained still equipped with the manacles that imprisoned them. Then when at the dissolution of the monasteries Henry VIII's soldiers had moved in to take possession the monks had fled, carrying what treasures they could, down into the crypt and along the underground tunnel that linked their community with the nuns at Spinney Abbey. But half-way along they came across their sisters-in-Christ making a similar panic-stricken escape; trapped in the tunnel in confusion they then became aware of an even more deadly presence, water. As the flood surged in screams and cries mingled with desperate prayers but to no avail; soon there was only a deathly silence as together monk and nun perished.

Ever since then there have been ghostly tales associated with the area. Of how Henry's favourite Queen, Anne Bolyn, whose initials are intertwined with his in the screen of King's College Chapel, could be seen riding in a coach drawn by headless horses, driven by a headless coachman with the executed Queen sitting therein, her pale and bloody head on her lap.

She had been spotted one night by a poacher, who burst into the Maid's Head to recount: "Oi've jus sin the owd cuch an' headless hosses in Red Barn Lane. The cuchman set up in it with no hid on his showlders and the back of the cuch is stuck full o' swords and daggers".

So vivid was the tale that the drinkers rose up and, armed with muzzle-loaders and stable forks, took to the ditch and crept down the Lane. Sure enough in the moonlight, under scudding clouds, loomed a black carriage. A headless steed was in the shafts and a hunched and headless figure on the box-seat. Swords and the like were indeed sticking up in the back of the coach.

Suddenly the silence was broken by a thunderous crash as a gun went off. The ghostly coach started forward; the steed, a white donkey with a black head, brayed to the moon. The coachman, a drunken sweep his head snoring on his belly, fell backwards into the brooms stacked on his cart. And the frightened fenmen returned post-haste to the inn to tell their tale, a tale that improved as it was recounted night by night.

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Though many of the monks and nuns from Spinney and Denny had perished as they fled though the underground tunnel, two had survived – or so the story went, related in a piece of rustic verse entitled 'The Monk and the Miller's Daughter'

In the days of old the monks, we are told,

Were given, alas! to drinking,
To cheek and chine, to ale and wine,
And pretty girls to winking;
But at Wicken the prior and every friar
Were pure as holy water,
And of Wicken's Abbey 'tis mine to sing
Of the monk and the miller's daughter.

She was so fair that sure no care
Could in her bosom rankle!
She'd a waist a man might swear by too,
And such a foot and ankle;
Her eyes were like forget-me-nots
That grew beside the water,
Oh, the finest flower in her father's mill,
Said the monk, was the miller's daughter!

Now the clergy are but men, you know,
Though angels some have thought 'em,
And Cupid smiles when by his wiles
The rascal oft hath caught 'em.
No wonder then, like other men,
One monk lost his self-possession
And to the maid, who'd oft confessed,
He made his own confession.

Day after day so happy they,
The maiden and the friar,
Till a cloud at last was gathering fast-
That cloud was Wicken's prior.
One day he found in the Abbey's ground,
While wandering near that quarter,
With his right arm placed round the maiden's waist
The monk and the miller's daughter.

Now the reverend face of his prior's grace
Was filled with indignation.
‘O vir turpissime et nequissime’
Such was his exclamation!
'Base girl, begone! You, Friar John,
To your cell and bread and water!’
Oh, a precious mess was this, I guess,
For the monk and the miller's daughter.

They took next day his gown away,
But he met their frowns with laughter,
And straight repaired to his lady fair
And was married a fortnight after.
With his charming bride, by the water's side,
They dabbled in bricks and mortar,
And built them a snug little public-house
For the monk and the miller's daughter.

They sold good wine, and on the sign,
To show them learning pat in,
'Pro omnibus vinum teneo,'
The friar put in Latin.
And mediaeval bargemen came that way
As beside the water,
And oft would stop to take a drop
With the monk and the miller's daughter.

The initials four above the door
The customers selected,
And so Pout Hall, the place did call,
Which still is recollected.
All else forgot, that once bright spot
Stands lone amid the water,
But passing by we'll breathe a sigh,
For the monk and the miller's daughter.

Was this then the origin of the notorious inn that was now such a problem to the Giblins?

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The University party, now well into another bottle of their Burwell host's wine, started to examine the phenomenon of ghosts, of which the fenland possessed an abundance.

Salisbury Dunn told of one hamlet, four miles east of Ely, where there'd been a scratching and tapping from without the thin wall of a cottage, which the occupant was content to ignore. But then it transferred to the chamber door so the man rose from his bed and opened the door. There stood a shadowy man-like figure; it descended the stairs, passed through the door and suddenly disappeared in the yard. The man told the tale with perfect sincerity, and his wife backed him up.

Of course Ely common has always had its spectre in the form of an animal. "I know three people who've been severely frightened when treading on ground supposed to be haunted. A man of strong religious instinct, and very abstemious, was crossing the common on a dark night when he became conscious that a very large black dog had sprung up beside him; his way was by a lonely path to a lane and the dog kept him company. On arriving there he attempted to drive it away & spoke to it but to his utter consternation the dog replied: 'You are right now; keep so'. He's never dared go out on the common at dark ever since, even untold riches would not tempt him to do so."

In another instance two men went in search of a donkey; each one thought he'd seen it but when they approached it vanished into thin air. "Ah, but was it a donkey, they saw, or an

ass", interjected Gunning; "because if so it could have been Margret Pryor of Longstanton come back again! Mind you she would have been an old woman – because it happened back in the 1650's". He had been researching in the University Library when he had come across an account of a trial tried at the Cambridge Assizes in July 1659.

Margret Pryor came to court complaining how she'd been bewitched by Widow Morlin and William Allen. She had been sleeping in her bed beside her husband one November night when suddenly: "Widow Morlin took me out of bed and put a bridle in my mouth and transformed me into a bay mare. I was rid from Dinton to Maddenly House" There her riders had gone inside to dine on mutton, rabbits and lamb, leaving Margret tethered. She shook her head and the snaffle or bit came out of her mouth and miraculously she appeared in her created form, to the great astonishment of the neighbours.

But this was plainly ridiculous – where could one get Lamb at that time of year & how could a mare distinguish between the different types of meat anyway. The judge questioned her further: when she transformed back into a woman her smock was all of a muck sweat and was bloody, her sides being exceedingly rent and torn just as if they were spur-gald. But when she was a mare, how could she have worn a smock?

And there was more: he asked whether her hands and feet were not gauled and dirty with their riding on her? Margret replied that her hands ailed her nothing but her hinder feet were lamentably bruised and changed as black as coal. Again this was nonsense: everyone knew that when horses were ridden hard that it was the fore feet – her hands – that were soonest beaten and damaged.

And why, having been ridden to Madingley, was she not ridden home again? Margret claimed that she had burnt elder bark and her own hair and that when Widow Morlin came out she had no more powers over her. Then why had it taken so long for her to make the accusations, this had happened in November and did not come to trial for nearly two years? She replied that she had been compelled by a warrant from the justices to proceed with the prosecution and somebody – she'd not say who - had paid her the money to proceed.

On this basis the case had come to court, and on such evidence two people stood in danger of losing their lives for witchcraft. It was alleged that they had invoked the power of the devil to transform a woman into a horse and that the devil could amend God's own creation. Was it not true that their only crime was to subscribe to the Quaker faith, and that this was just another example of the persecution such believers were experiencing at the hands of the University?

["A lying wonder discovered … 1659" pam 161; Titterton pam 230]

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From one witch, the tale switched to another: one who had caused the death of one of the most important people in the land, the grandmother of none other than Oliver Cromwell himself!
It had all started in the Huntingdonshire village of Warboys back in 1589.
The Throckmortons were amongst the most prominent families in all England; one had been ambassador to France, another a successful financier who gave his name to Throgmorton Street in London and Bess was lady-in-waiting to Queen Elizabeth herself. She must have been quite a girl for she caught the eye of Sir Walter Raleigh, the Queen's favourite; and not just his eye for she became pregnant and married him – which led to them both being banished from court.

It was time for other members of the family to seek a new life too and Robert Throckmorton decided to exchange the bustle of London life for a quiet place in the country, moving to the Manor House next to the church at Warboys. He was well-connected; Sir Henry Cromwell, Oliver's grandfather and Lord of the Manor, was a close friend, as was his wife. It was to prove a bad move.
All went well until November 1589 when his daughter Jane, then nearly 10 years old, fell sick. Sometimes she would sneeze very loud and thick for the space of half an hour together, then lay quietly like one in a great trance or swoon. Then she would begin to swell and heave up her belly so as none was able to bend her or keep her down. Sometimes she would shake one leg as if the palsy had been in it, sometimes the other; presently she would shake one of her arms, and then the other, soon after her head, as if she had been infected with the running palsy.

After these symptoms had continued for two or three days kindly village folk came to visit and see what if anything they could do – and perhaps take a view of the family that had so recently moved in. Amongst them was their neighbour Alice Samuel, wife of John and mother of a young unmarried daughter. She was a poor countrywoman with a wrinkled face, hairy lip and squeaking voice but she was nobody's fool and soon formed the opinion that the girl was feigning illness to attract attention

When Alice first entered the room Jane was being held in another woman's arms by the fireside, so she went into the chimney corner and sat down beside her. She had not been there long, when the child grew something worse, and cried out, "Look where the old witch sitteth did you ever see one more like a witch than she is? Take her away for I cannot abide to look at her." The mother was very angry with her daughter, rebuked her & put her to bed. But Jane's tantrums continued, so they sent a specimen of her urine to Cambridge for analysis; back came the diagnosis – she might have the worms and the appropriate medicine was prescribed. It didn't work, so they sent a second, and then a third sample. The family got a second opinion from another doctor, neither could detect a cause for the illness, but having failed three times Dr Barrow said he thought it might be witchcraft.

Two months later two other daughters, Mary and Elizabeth, started copying their younger sister's behaviour, and echoing her complaints against Alice Samuel: "she hath bewitched us and she will kill us if you do not take her away". Then the youngest sister took up the cry and the eldest started to sneeze, screech and groan fearfully. The more the anguished parents tried to calm them the more their children grew violent. Then things got worse: all the women servants started to have fits, all crying out against Mother Samuel: "Take her away for God's sake and burn her, for she will kill us all if you let her alone"

News of the family's troubles reached the ear of their uncle, Gilbert Pickering from Titchmarsh Grove in Northamptonshire, but on his arrival he found everything quiet and peaceful. Several other people were there and it was decided to fetch Mother Samuel too, she'd often said she'd do anything she could to help. But now she was not so keen to come so Gilbert decided to force her anyway, together with her daughter Agnes and another lady suspected of witchcraft.

No sooner had Mrs Samuel entered the room than all the girls commenced an elaborate performance, arching their bodies and throwing out their arms with great groans. Gilbert picked up Jane and carried her to bed, but it was all he could do to keep her lying still. The family decided to disperse the girls to various places away from the dangerous proximity of Mother Samuel and one, Elizabeth, went home with her uncle Gilbert. As soon as their horses left Warboys her fits subsided, but it was not to last. At dinner, the girl cried out that Mother Samuel had put a mouse in her mouth and that she had a mouse in her belly; then after she'd drunk milk she claimed she could hear the spirit in her belly lapping the milk. All this worried Gilbert who quickly returned the girl to her parents' house.

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The Throckmorton family at Warboys were worried; their daughters were manifesting strange symptoms, groaning, arching their backs and crying out against their neighbour, Alice Samuel, claiming she had bewitched them.

They were visited by a family friend, Lady Cromwell, who rode across from Ramsey. But she had not long stepped into the house before the children fell into fits which so scared her Ladyship that she sent for Alice and charged her with witchcraft. It was an accusation Mother Samuel denied, though the girls took this opportunity to renew their screams and strange behaviour. Then as Alice turned to leave Lady Cromwell seized a pair of scissors, clipped off a lock of hair and passed it to Mrs Throckmorton, urging her to burn it. Shocked at this assault Mother Samuel turned to her saying: "Lady, why do you use me thus, I never did you any harm as yet". It was these final two words that were to prove her downfall.

That night Lady Cromwell suffered nightmares in which she was strangely tormented by a cat that Mother Samuel had sent; it started to pluck off all the skin and flesh from her body. Her struggling and moaning awoke her bedfellow, the wife of Oliver Cromwell, who tried to calm her. But the dream was so vivid Lady Cromwell did not dare to return to sleep and not long after developed fits very similar to those of the Throckmorton girls. Sometimes her pain would be in one arm, sometimes in the other, many times in her head, she was always shaking as if she had the palsy. And until her dying day, some 16 months later, she could never forget those words of Mother Samuel 'Lady, I never hurt you ***as yet***,'.

At Christmas 1590 Henry Pickering, another of the children's uncles and a scholar of Cambridge, visited the family at Warboys, bringing two of his other students with him. They decided that they would sort the matter out; by luck they spotted Alice crossing the street and accosted her. But she had no interest in talking to them and told them so in a very loud voice, not giving them any opportunity to interrupt. When one of lads urged her to lower her voice she replied she was: "Born in a mill, begot in a kiln, she must have her will" - and could speak no softlier.

One thing she made clear: the Throckmorton children were making up the entire business, their fits were no more than the action of spoilt children, determined on causing mischief and they should be punished. And when the students asked her about her faith in God she declared that "her God would deliver her, her God would defend her and revenge her of her enemy". But was this the same God that others served, they wondered.

Then Henry had his say: "If she had wrought this wickedness upon the children then the vengeance of God would surely wait upon her unto death. However she might deceive herself and the world for a time, yet there was no way to prevent the judgements of God but by her confession and repentance. Which if she did not in time, he hoped one day to see her burned at a stake, and he himself would bring fire and wood and the children would blow the coals".

These were frightening threats at a time when witches were being burnt across the land, but Alice was not going to be scared by such boys: "I had rather see you doused over head and ears in the village pond!" and so they parted.

Matters continued for the next two years, the girls' fits receded – except when they had company; then things changed. Their legs became full of sores and pain and were so paralysed they could not straighten them, but their symptoms eased whenever Alice was with them and returned as soon as she left. Things got so bad that Alice must be brought to the house – but her husband John refused point blank to let her go, fearful of what would happen.

There was only one alternative: if the witch would not come to the bewitched, then they must go to her. The village looked on as Master Thockmorton carried his daughters, one by one, to the Samuel's house. Instantly they professed themselves cured. They stayed all day perfectly well – despite Alice's husband throwing water on the fire in an attempt to freeze them into returning home. Then as darkness fell it was decided they must spend the night too. This was too much for John Samuel who agreed that if the girls went home he would let his wife come to them next day. So they returned, and so did their fits.

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Alice Samuel was in an impossible position. The daughters of the powerful Throckmorton family of Warboys had accused her of bewitching them. Alice however was convinced it was just wickedness on behalf of the girls – they were deliberately throwing fits to draw attention to themselves, unhappy that they had moved from the London court to this quiet Huntingdonshire village on the edge of the fens. But there was nothing for it, in November 1592 she had to move in to their house.

For the first few days all was quiet, the girls were placid with none of the fits, soreness or lameness that had tormented them. But Alice felt a prisoner and took an opportunity to sneak away into her own home next door to see her husband and family. As soon as she'd gone the girls resumed their antics, claiming the old witch had gone back to feed her spirits & strengthen her control over them. They refused to speak to anybody except her, and would only eat what she'd given them.

Their father was worried. He called Alice before him and demanded she predict when the fits would occur, and they duly arrived at the time she said – but as the girls were always in the room to hear her prediction this was not unexpected. Then his friends from Cambridge University arrived to acquaint him of their latest discoveries when trawling through the ancient books in the University Library: how a witch had spirits to do her bidding, but she had to feed and reward them with blood every day. Armed with this new knowledge Robert Throckmorton and his brother Henry Pickering demanded Alice confess, but she vehemently denied the charge. The frightened woman protested in the name of the Lord that she was no witch. Her anger and bitterness so terrified the men that they fled from the house, scared that she would curse them and the entire household.

But Alice suffered a slight injury: she cut her chin, which started to bleed. This was seen as proof that she had indeed been feeding her own blood to her imps. Then the daughter Elizabeth claimed that her mouth had been locked up and she could not eat, drink or speak. Robert declared that if his daughter was destined to starve, then so should the witch, Alice was denied food. The fast continued for some time before the girl gave in to her hunger, her mouth miraculously becoming loose and bewitcher and bewitched tucked in to a hearty meal.

If Alice was sick of being detained in the house, the children were getting fed up with their games. They decided to move the process on, saying how they had learned that the witch would declare her guilt from her own lips at Epiphany, January 6th. They urged her to confess – but Alice replied she had nothing to confess to. They accused her of evil living, of neglecting to attend church, how happy she would be if she did but confess and be pardoned for her wicked ways. The girls would forgive her, all would be well – if only she would confess.

As the pressures built up so Alice's health weakened, her nose started to bleed heavily – surely proof that she'd been feeding those imps again. She suffered pain in her stomach and

heart - and this worried the Throckmorton's, not so much for Alice's sake but their own – would people say they had starved or mistreated the old woman they had held prisoner in their house. The stomach pain continued – it was, she claimed, an evil spirit that had gotten into her belly, and it had only started after she'd been incarcerated in this haunted house.

Then daughter Jane's fits returned in such a violent fashion that even Alice became worried, thinking the girl might die. The children pleaded with her to confess and relieve their sister's suffering, but again Alice refused. Then, perhaps sensing victory, Jane redoubled her screaming, arching her back, moaning terribly, scaring everybody in the household and all those who gathered at the doors and windows aware that there had to be some dramatic ending to all this shortly, one way or another.

Finally, Alice could stand it no longer, bullied, cajoled, threatened, coaxed, she finally repeated the words that Robert Throckmorton demanded: "I charge thee spirit, in the name of God, that Mistress Jane never have this fit". And no sooner had the words left her lips than the fits ceased, the other girls' symptoms disappeared and for the first time in months there was peace in the house. Even Alice was amazed believing for the first time that perhaps she, after all, had truly been the source of all their ills.

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Old Alice Samuel had been convinced that she must be a witch after all; when she saw Robert Throckmorton's daughters so suddenly and convincingly restored to health she fell on her knees and begged forgiveness.

But their father now saw his chance to revenge himself on the old woman; at first he was friendly: "Of course I forgive you, and so will God", his wife forgave her and all the children forgave her. But then he asked, almost casually, "Tell me how came you to be such a woman". Sobbing, Alice replied – or so he claimed: "Master, I have given my soul to the Devil"

Once the words had left her mouth the old lady was distraught. They sent for the parson but even he could not bring her comfort, so the next day, being Sunday 24th December 1592 he preached on the theme of repentance and acquainted his congregation with Alice's confession. As Alice was amongst the worshippers she felt every eye turn upon her. But was her admission true, or had it been forced out of her as some would doubtless claim. Now was the moment of truth; in front of all her friends and neighbours Alice repeated her confession and begged all to pray for her and forgive her.

While the congregation in church gave her support and understanding this was completely absent when she returned to her own home and to the husband and family from whom she had been separated for so long. They would not, could not, accept that she was a witch and by the next day, Christmas Day itself, Alice too had changed her mind.

Robert Throckmorton and the minister were informed that she had retracted the confession and went around to her house to question her further. Why did she say what she now denied? Alice replied: "It was for joy because I did see your children so presently well after your good prayers and mine". But this was not good enough, Throckmorton's patience was at an end and he arranged for her to be taken before the Bishop of Lincoln for proper examination.

Arrangements were made to have her escorted north by the constable, far away from the village of Warboys that had been her home for so long. And who could tell what would befall her once she left its safety. So Alice changed her mind and confessed once more. This time

she would be given no chance of denial, this time it would be written down and signed, with villagers stationed just outside the windows, their ears pressed to the shutters, who could testify to the accuracy of the words she was dictating to the minister. It was a wise precaution for a few moments after she'd finished Alice changed her mind again. It was then that her husband returned home, surprised to see the crowds in his house, horrified to hear what she had confessed to, and prevented from knocking sense into her by those around her.

On Boxing Day Alice and her daughter were taken to Buckden to be examined by the Bishop, three days later she was questioned once more, this time by two justices. Their interviews were recorded:

"Being asked whether a dun chicken did ever suck on her chin, and how often she saith that it sucked twice and no more since Christmas Even last. She did scarce feel it, but when she wiped it off with her hand, her chin did bleed. The ill and the trouble that hath come to Master Throckmorton's children hath come by means of the said chicken which is now gone from the said children and come into her, and are now in the bottom of her belly. And this morning they caused her to be so full that she could scant lace her coat; and that on the way, they weighed so heavy that the horse she rid on did fall down and was not able to carry her. A strange man hath given her six spirits to vex and torment the children of Master Throckmorton and she rewarded the spirits by letting them suck her blood, before sending them to do her bidding. The children spoke the truth when they saw and heard the spirits, and that it was she that controlled them with becks and nods. The spirits came to her in the form of chickens, and were named, Pluck, Catch, White and Smack; these she called by making smacking sounds with her mouth"

On & on she rambled, happy to confess to anything that was put to her by her questioners who in turn became more and more extreme. Then when she was quite finished Alice and her daughter were flung into Huntingdon gaol to await trial for witchcraft.

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As the Christmas of 1592 approached Alice Samuel found herself locked up in Huntingdon gaol, and nor was she alone, for her daughter Agnes was also committed, also accused of witchcraft.

The Throckmorton family of Warboys spent a relatively peaceful period, the children no longer subject to the fits that had plagued them. But then things changed. As the day of the trial neared their father, Robert, sought the release of Agnes – there had been little evidence against her after all. Once she was brought to the house then the girls started their antics all over again – the fits, twitching, writhing, nose-bleeds, a masterful performance that so scared young Agnes that she was persuaded to call upon the devil to free the children from their afflictions. Immediately the girls fell silent, they had their proof. It was an easy step now to get the girl to confess to her mother's involvement in Lady Cromwell's illness and, for good measure, to bewitching Mistress Pickering of Ellington who had complained of pains in the legs

Now two of the Samuels were ready for conviction, that just left one more, the father, John. He walked into their clutches as he came to see what they were doing to his daughter. Immediately the children recommenced their by-now well-rehearsed routine and it was not long before he was bullied into admitting that he too was a witch.

As Spring came the scene switched to Huntingdon. Robert Thockmorton and his daughter Joan took lodgings at the Crown Inn, close to the courthouse, taking Agnes with them. There they were joined by the Judge and various justices and Joan laid on a bravura performance of trembling and shaking and twitching. She was only cured by Agnes' confession – "As I am a

witch so I charge ye devil to let Mistress Joan come out of her fit". It was something repeated time after time, to audience after audience.

Later it was daughter Jane's turn to perform, this time in the courthouse with John Samuel in the dock. He was nobody's fool and knew that if he recited the 'confession' he would be condemning himself, but the Judge instructed that if he refused then he would be sentenced to death anyway. So he said the words and the fits departed, just as everybody knew they would.

That left just Alice and by now more and more people had been found to testify against her. John Langley of the Crown Inn Brampton had refused her a meal so she had bewitched his horse and cattle, others had lost healthy pigs, one suffered a skin rash, another's shoes had broken mid-stride throwing him to the ground. Even the gaoler testified how his son and servant had thrown fits after he'd had to chain Alice to a bedpost as she was an unruly prisoner.

The jury had no doubts, they were all guilty as charged and deserved to die. But had they anything to say why they should not be condemned to death. "Yes", said Alice – "I am with child". Immediately the tension in the courtroom was broken, everybody collapsed into fits – this time of laughter, for the old hag in the dock was surely 80 if she was a day. But Alice was adamant, she was pregnant. So a new jury was summonsed, this time of women who made a minute examination of the old lady, coming back with the verdict that if she were expecting it could only be the Devil's baby! Her daughter Agnes was offered the same chance to plead pregnancy and escape the noose but she replied "Nay, that I will not do. It shall never be said that I was both a Witch and a whore"

The final act was played out on the gallows where all three were questioned one more time. By now Mother Samuel was a broken old lady who confessed to anything that came into her mind; how she had six spirits that lived upon her body and tormented her until she found mischief for them to do. One had caused the death of Lady Cromwell in revenge for snipping a lock of her hair, another had tormented the Throckmorton children, another she'd sent to sea. As for her husband, that ogre who had bullied her throughout their married life – well he was a witch without doubt. As for Agnes: she had nothing to do with any of it, she was as sweet and pure as the driven snow, there was no evidence against her at all and she did not deserve to die. But who would believe the word of a self-confessed witch?

All three were hanged on the 6th April 1593, their bodies stripped naked and exposed to public view. Some looked harder than others and it was the jailer who discovered a little lump of flesh in a place not decent to be seen where the imps had fed on Agnes' blood. And so the witches of Warboys became a tale to be told time and again – and repeated to members of the Pickwick Society at their gathering in The George and Vulture, Lombard Street.

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The discussions at Burwell had been most animated and interesting; once the details of the witches of Warboys had been exhausted the conversation had moved on to the isolated village of Isleham of which Salisbury Dunn had some personal knowledge.

"I've heard it said that this was the last place God ever made, and then he forgot to finish it off. The upland soil of the village itself is thin and hungry and the fens waterlogged in wet seasons. From the deplorable condition of its drainage only a small proportion is under cultivation and most of it has been ruined by turf diggers.

"Peat digging is hard work; first they have to clear any bushes or other vegetation, then the top layer has to be removed – or 'crumbed up' as flat as possible to let the digger get at the

peat and another area cleared for him to stack the peat on. Then the men cut a hole down into the peat just over a foot deep and start to cut.

“The pits often fill with water so they have leather thigh-boots, well-greased to make them supple and sometimes they have to strap boards or even stilts under them so as to stop themselves sinking into the peat. The men wear moleskin caps and waistcoats with eelskin gaiters to ward off the rheumatism and a hat – that’s important for on hot days he can put it in the drain to keep himself cool or thread it with elder sprigs to keep off the flies. Even so he’ll leave off before the mosquitoes start to come out at evening. Then it’s off to the pub. You can’t blame them, there’s no job thirstier than digging turf in hot weather, standing in an airless, humid pit, surrounded by flies. Mind you the lode water is quite clear and the diggers drink lots of it

“Its seasonal work, they can’t start until the frosty nights are over because a frozen block of peat will swell to double its size and never flare on the fire, just smoulder away. It means that their hands get softer during the winter months so when they start the hard work they get blisters, size of a halfpenny, that they close up by threading with a needle and wool to dry them off. Then the water cracks their skin – so they seal it up with hot shoemaker’s wax melted over a candle.

“They have their own language – a ‘cess’ is what they call a block of peat, and the size varies from place to place, but about six-and-a-half by four and a half by just over eight and a half inches, and they dig it from the cess pit. They take sixteen ‘cesses’ from a row and call this a ‘slaughter’, which they pile on the ‘staddle’ – the cleared area. There are nine ‘slaughters’ to the ‘hundred’ and ten ‘hundred’ to the ‘thousand’. Of course the fenmen can’t do reading and writing or adding up but they know how many hundred blocks of turf make a thousand – if they’re digging its thirteen ‘hundred’, if you’re buying or selling its twelve. That’s the Isleham measure, at Wicken they use a bigger becket – the new type of tool they use in preference to the moor spade - so you’ll 600 large turves to their thousand small ones – they call that a ‘knockit’

“They stack them up in rows, straight as a die, about ten chains long with a bit of grass, called a ‘tassle’ marking each complete ‘thousand’. On a good day a good man can cut a ‘thousand’ in about four hours. The blocks are stacked but they need to be turned to ensure all of them dry out the same and then after three months they’re ‘ricked’, 25 blocks high, on beds of litter to keep out the worms.

“Of course the stacked turves can get soaked when it rains but eventually they’ll get dry enough to be barrowed away, 120 cesses at a time. You should see them pushing these turf barrows – so heavy I can’t move them, but they train up young lads to do the job. They push these barrows over dikes on planks only fourteen inches wide and bolted together but if the lad wobbles and tips the load into the water then he has to fork out beer for all the diggers.

“They load the cesses on barges but as the river is higher than the fen they have to wheel the barrows up planks over the banks, down the other side then up again into the barge – though sometimes they’ll stretch the planks across trestles so they can be taken down to the boat in one go. Once the barge is fully laden the watermen have to keep to the deepest part of the channel or they run the risk of grounding, especially during the dry season.
“The turves are stacked in sheds with slats to keep the air circulating until it can be sold. That will be a winter job for the diggers in their own village, but they can’t shift them all and hawkers come around with ponies and carts to buy it off them”

The area of fens around Isleham, home to many of the peat diggers, was one to be seen once out of curiosity, though never visited again if one was paid a thousand pounds – at least in the opinion of Sailsbury Dunn.

The muddy black soil stretched unbroken to the horizon save for the embankment that strove to keep the waters of the River Lark in check, and numerous small wooden tarred drainage mills, their sails draped with cloths of various colours. These mills had to be worked whenever the wind blew and the rain had fallen, pushing the water from fen dykes up into the higher river. It was a job that could be combined with peat digging, especially if there was a wife on hand who could dash out to remove the sail cloths should a gale suddenly blow up, saving the mill from being blown off its base and walked across the fens. And being beside dyke and river there was always fishing or eel catching to occupy any spare moment both to fill the bellies of the inhabitants and to export.

But scattered along the banks were homes and hovels, some wooden, more constructed from the material of the surrounding fen, clay bricks and turf, thatched with reeds. The numbers of people living in this isolated area had been increasing as more of the land was brought into agriculture thanks to the success of drainage. Their need for companionship and relaxation had been catered for by the erection of two new public houses, the Anchor and the Horse and Groom, to supplement the old Cock, the pub that served the watermen. But these were not enough incentive for youngsters to stay on in the area. For the two-roomed cottages that housed their parents and perhaps eight children were too small to admit of another family and when the son married he had no option but to move away to seek employment and perhaps a fortune elsewhere.

Given the isolated nature of the area and the natural suspicion of its inhabitants to any outsider they were regarded as strange folk, indeed this was something they actually encouraged, quite content to spread tales against themselves to maintain their reputation for eccentricity.

One man who did have their trust was the parson, at times fetched away from his roaring fire in the middle of a rough, dark night to minister to the needs of a sick person five or six miles across the fens. He would pull on his thick boots, his gaiters with waterproof elongations, a waterproof overcoat and cape, fasten oil lanterns to the bottom of the stirrups of his horse to give some illumination and head off into the blackness.

Travelling is at all time difficult, with little attempt made to repair the rutted fen droves which, particularly in winter, are covered in a shiny black mud through which the horse flounders with difficulty, sometimes sinking up to knee deep in the miry slough. But more often than not the route is along the top of a riverbank, with the black waters of the river on one side and the steep slippery drop down the slope to the muddy fenland on the other. Exposed to the biting fenland wind the stirrup lantern swings even more, casting its feeble light into the blackness and reflecting back from the eyes of rats and other nocturnal creatures. The track, though quite wide, is rutted by the hooves of previous travellers and of the horses and cattle that graze on the grass of the bank and washland. Areas of grazing are separated off by fences which carry on across the top of the dyke, so the rider is always striving to ensure he stays on the bank but also keeps his eyes peeled for the obstruction that may rise before him. Now he needs all his courage for, unless there is a gate, he has no option but to urge his mount to jump that fence, knowing full well that the ground on either side of it will be particularly muddy, given that cattle will always cross at that spot.

Even more frightening is the sight of another lantern coming along the bank towards you; for who else would be out on such a night. Even if the approaching horseman is a friend there is the problem of passing without one horse losing its footing and sliding down into the blackness. At times of flood the banks will be patrolled by men keeping watch for weak

spots, slippages or areas were the water was finding its way through the earth barrier that protects the cottages huddled below. They are also keeping watch for other men intent on sabotage for if a bank was going to burst it would be better to burst on the other side of the river and flood somebody else's land. Too many fenmen had set out on such patrols and were never seen again, but who could say what fate befell them, an innocent slip or a fall preceded by a blow from a cudgel?

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Henry Gunning had enchanted Pickwick and friends with his account of the discussions around the tenant's table at Burwell, and all were as disappointed as Gunning himself had been when the parish clerk had entered to say that he was about to chime the bells, summoning all to church.

"I confess that the Sexton, who came about a quarter of an hour afterwards to say the bells were ringing, was very unwelcome to us all. The Vice Chancellor himself seemed more reluctant than the rest – in fact the only person to take any notice at all was the Vicar who had to preach the sermon. The poor man became more and more agitated until, seeing the party were still inclined to sit and chat, had no option but to take his leave. He hustled off as fast as his legs would carry him towards the church, expecting any moment to be overtaken by the University coach."

But his fellow diners, were still sitting. The Vice-Chancellor asked, 'What sort of a preacher is Mr. Turner?' to which the tenant replied, 'For my own part, I would not go over the threshold to hear him preach'. 'If that be your opinion, who have had frequent opportunities of hearing him,' said Dr. Gretton, 'I am of your opinion too; and we will remain and have a few more glasses of your fine old port.'

Meanwhile at church the Vicar, after waiting a considerable time for the Vice-Chancellor was at length obliged to proceed without him, only to find his prayers interrupted by the clatter of approaching hooves and the rumble of carriage wheels, the loud animated conversation of some by now quite merry academics, the squeaking of the church door on its hinges and the rustle of a congregation whose curiosity could not but allow them to open their tight-shut eyes for a quick peep at the arriving dignitaries

The excellence of the tenant's ale was apparent, not only in the red faces of the Vice Chancellor, the Clerk, and the Sexton, but also in the vigour with which two or three officials, furnished with white staves, exercised them whenever they found any of the children inattentive. Not contented with showing their authority over the younger part of the congregation, one of them inflicted so heavy a blow on the head of a young man who was sleeping, that it resounded through the church. The person thus distinguished started up, and rubbing his head, had the mortification to find all his neighbours laughing at his expense. To use a fancy phrase, 'he showed fight', and was only restrained by the presence of the Vice-Chancellor (who rose to see what was the matter) from giving the peace-officer a hearty drubbing.

"The service finally at an end we staggered into our carriage and commenced the perilous journey back to Cambridge. Crossing the fields towards the high road the jolting and swaying of the coach jostled us together and prompted old animosities to rise to the surface. Beverley accused me of purposely stamping on his corn and threatened me with violence; for the second time the Vice-Chancellor had to act as peacekeeper. But Beverley would have none of it 'He was d-mned to be spoken to in that way' and matters grew even more heated

“Just before we left Newmarket Heath, the Vice-Chancellor stopped the carriage, and ordering the University Marshal to open the door, observed that Mr. Beverley's conduct was so gross he would no longer travel in the same carriage with him. He ordered Beverley to vacate his inside seat and ride alongside the coachman. But Beverley remonstrated that he had the same right to an inside place as the Vice-Chancellor; that, as a Master of Arts, he had paid as much towards the conveyance as a Doctor of Divinity; and that, if the Vice-Chancellor did not like to travel with him he should get out and walk”

It was a challenge Dr Gretton declined to accept and the journey was resumed. But soon the gentle swaying of the coach, combined with the effects of the excellence of the ale and wine, which had been so cordially pressed upon them, had its effect and warlike utterances gave way to sonorous snores which – so it is said – awoke babies from their repose in the cottages alongside the road that led back to Cambridge.

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“Now if you hadn’t been asleep you might have seen old Tommy Panton’s ghost”. The voice came from nowhere – or at least Pickwick could see nobody who might have spoken. The armchairs in the lounge of the University Arms were empty apart from himself, Henry Gunning and the rest of their group.

“He’s been seen round there several times, ‘cos that’s where they buried him”, and the disembodied voice lapsed into verse:

“Oh! Tuting, Stamford, Woodock, Larkin,
Pray look out sharp, for he’ll be darking.
He watched the trials others made,
And still will follow the same trade;
And near the Devil’s Ditch be seen
Gliding by moonlight, long and lean”.

Once more Pickwick stared round, then noticed a whiff of smoke arising from the back of an armchair facing the wall; when he advanced and peered into it he saw a diminutive elderly man, his face weather-beaten, his eyes sparkling. He gave his name as Sam Brogden, his profession a tout

“I’m bin around Newmarket all my days”, he confided once he had joined the rest of those assembled, “born in a stable, spent years mucking out horses, spreading the muck about the gentry and generally being a thorn in the flesh of the Jockey Club.

“Them gentlemen consider us touts to be proper scoundrels, so of course we live up to our reputation. But we perform an important function, keeping our eyes and ears peeled for anything to help our various patrons gain a little advantage when it comes to horse racing.

“It’s a hard, uncomfortable life: I have to be up early on the heath on freezing cold mornings so I can get into position before the horses come out. There’s a little furze bush I like to get to, then I dig down into the ground until there’s just me head and telescope sticking out. But even so I got caught once; Charles Blanton, one of the trainers, grabbed me by the hair, pulled me across the heath and dumped me in a horse pond. So as soon as I’d dried out I went to the barber and had all my hair cut real short – let the old devil catch hold of it again, if he could!

“There’s scarcely a trial at Newmarket that’s not watched but the trainers will try anything they can to stop us seeing. One arranged for his jockeys to come in to the stables in the middle of the night, after the stableboys were asleep. They saddled their own horses, had their run, then took them back again, even rubbed them down so nobody should know anything

about it. But one of the jockeys didn't clean out his horse's feet properly and the regular lad noticed a wad of turf in its near forefoot. So he sent a message out to me and I had a word with the other touts to see what we should do about it. Of course we didn't know what the result had been but we all decided to make up the same information to send to our regular employers – and it made a good story! I got a bonus for that!

"People will always gamble, as you know whist and casino are taught in many girls' schools and cock fighting and boxing are popular at Newmarket, but horse-racing is the best. In the early days it was the grooms or hangers-on who would hold the money but then it got more organised with professionals coming along. They had the advantage because they always paid up after a race, unlike some gentlemen I could name. Crutch Robinson – he was lame as you'd gather - would sit up night after night in the Black Bear waiting for anybody who came in with information and take the bets then and there.

"On race days the betters used to assemble at various betting-posts, frequently at the Red Post on the edge of the Cambridgeshire course. Old Munten made a good business here from the back of a rat-tailed nag, laying short odds to Cambridge undergraduates. But soon they found it was not a convenient way of doing business – trying to jot down figure on horseback and then making their way back to town with a bag full of winnings"

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Mention of the word 'Newmarket' brought a gleam back into the eye of the General for he had happy memories of visiting that town with an undergraduate friend some 60 years before. In those days a visit to the races was an essential part of a gentleman's curriculum; indeed for a man studying mathematics it was essential, an opportunity to test his calculations of the odds and the opportunity of reviving a bank balance depleted by his failure to calculate those same odds at the card table.

The great adventure started with a tour of those establishments of fine horseflesh, the Cambridge livery stables. Then mounted on screws hired from Haggis or Death, on hacks procured from Sanders or Hopkins, on their own polo ponies, or possibly with tandems, coaches or dog-carts, a mass of students descended on the Heath like a squad of irregular cavalry,

General Wale commenced: "Dick Riot, Harry Scamper, and I, went together to Newmarket, the first day of the meeting. I was mounted on my little bay mare, that cost me thirty guineas in the north. . . . I never crossed a better tit in my life; and I reckoned she would turn out as tight a little thing as any in England. Then she was as fleet as the wind. Why, I raced with Dick and Harry all the way from Cambridge to Newmarket; Dick rode his roan gelding, and Harry his chestnut mare (which both had speed), but I beat them hollow".

But a horse's prowess was not to be tested along the road, it had to prove itself on the racetrack itself, against the best in the land. And Newmarket provided that opportunity. For as the professional jockeys urged their mounts on towards the winning post the number of horses in contention increased as owners and amateurs – even undergraduates – joined in the race for the last half-mile or so. This seriously interfered with the competition and was a practice fraught with danger; in 1802 a countryman and his horse fell, bringing down Mr Heathcote whose horse broke its neck The rider was picked up for dead, but afterwards recovered, though several horsemen had ridden over him. Only earlier this year had the Jockey Club clamped down by threatening to impose fines of 25 sovereigns on riders who interfered with the race.

But it was not this that had deterred Wale: "I would have joined in myself, but that year there were near a thousand horsemen on the Heath and the ground was so wet that after such a

cavalry charge the ground was indescribable. I have no doubt my horse would have coped but I would have been so splattered with mud as to ruin my new riding clothes.

“I cannot help telling you that I was dressed in my green riding frock, with plate buttons, with my cordovan boots, and my round hat, in the true sporting taste, so that altogether I don't believe there was a more knowing figure on the course. I was very flush too, for Ladyday happening damn'd luckily, just about the time of the races, I had received fifty guineas for my quarterage.

“As soon as we came upon the course, we met with some jolly bucks from London; I never saw them before; however, we were soon acquainted, and I took up the odds, but I was damnably let in, for I lost thirty guineas slap the first day. The day or two after, I had no remarkable luck one way or another, but at last I laid all my cash I had left, upon Mr. Cookson's Diamond, who lost, but between you and me, I have a great notion the jockey rode booty.

“However, I had a mind to push my luck as far as I could; so I sold my poor little mare for twelve pieces, went to the Coffee-house, and left them all behind me at the hazard-table. And I should not have been able to have got back to Cambridge that night, if Bob Whip, of Trinity, had not taken me up in his phaeton.”

Financial impoverishment was a hazard that rich gentlemen could soon overcome; all it took was a visit to one of the Cambridge booksellers who would provide a list of those Classical texts that were an essential part of an undergraduate’s reading, each marked with the price. Then a letter home would invariably result in a loan to cover the cost of their acquisition. For investment now would ensure wealth later once the son had secured some lucrative position in a country parsonage. Now once more funded the young man could pay off his bookmaker’s bills, borrow the books and continue to gamble. But for Newmarket residents financial embarrassment could mean a spell in a less comfortable establishment, the town workhouse

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Sam Brogden the Newmarket tout had seen too many young Cambridge gentlemen lose their inheritance to the bookmakers, indeed his own brother Tom was now a resident in the racing town’s workhouse for failure to settle an outstanding debt.

And Sam had a favour to ask; for although he knew odds and money, he did not know much of writing and letters. Some days earlier he had received a letter despatched from that austere institution and had nobody who could decipher it for him. It was a task Pickwick was happy to perform and it at once became clear it was in a rough verse. It read:

Since I cannot, dear bother, with you hold communion,
I’ll give you a sketch of our life in the Union.
But how to begin I don't know, I declare:
Let me see; well, the first is our grand bill of fare.
We've skilly for breakfast; at night bread and cheese,
And we eat it, and then go to bed if we please.
Two days in the week we've puddings for dinner,
And two we have broth so like water., but thinner;
Two meat and potatoes, of this none to spare;
One dry bread and cheese - and this Is our fare.

And now then my clothes I will try to pourtray;
They're made of coarse cloth, and the colour is grey;
My jacket and waistcoat don't fit me at all;

My shirt is too short, or else I am too tall;
My shoes are not pairs, though of course I have two,
They are down at the heel, and my stockings are blue.
But what shall I say of the things they call breeches?
Why mine are so large they'd have fitted John Fitches.

John Fitches, you'll say, well, pray who was he?
Why one of the fattest men I ever did see.
To be well understood, they ought to be seen;
Neither breeches nor trousers, but something between
And though they're so large, you'll remember, I beg
That they're low on the waist and high on the leg.

And no braces allowed me - oh dear, oh dear;
We are each other's glass, so I know I look queer.
A sort of Scotch bonnet we wear on our heads;
And I sleep in a room where there are just fourteen beds;
Some are sleeping, some snoring, some talking, some playing,
Some fighting, some swearing, but very few praying.

Here are nine at a time who work on the mill:
We take it by turns, so it never stands still:
A half an hour each gang, 'tis not very hard,
And when we are off we can walk in the yard.
We have nurseries here, where the children are crying;
And hospitals too for the sick and the dying.

But I must not forget to record in my verse,
All who die here are honoured to ride in a hearse.
I sometimes look up to the bit of blue sky
High over my head, with a tear in my eye,
Surrounded by walls that are too high to climb,
Confined is a felon without any crime;
Not a field, not a house, not a hedge can I see -
Not a plant, not a flower, not a bush nor a tree,
Except a geranium or two that appear
At the governor's window, to smile even here.

But I find I am got too pathetic by half
And my object was only to cause you to laugh
So my love to yourself, your kind wife and daughter,
I'll drink to your health in a tin of cold water:
Of course, we've no wine, no porter nor beer,
So you see that we all are teetotallers here.

Sam was touched by such poetic effusion but also more than a little confused; for like himself his brother was quite unable to read or write. So who was it that had penned the verse on his behalf, presumably some other unfortunate soul who was paying his debts for past misdeeds, and perhaps earning a copper or two in the process.

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Pickwick encouraged Sam Brogden, the Newmarket tout to recount something of his lifetime association with that town. He was happy to oblige.

“I was born in a stable just outside the place; my father was at that time somewhat straitened in his circumstances and the first thing I can remember is how my mother turned pedlar. She had a basket hung with pins, needles, tape, garters and other small haberdashery, on her arm, and hawked them round the villages, while I trotted along after her.

“Soon I was encouraged to go from house to house and beg and I soon got the knack of that. I told one story at one house, another at another and could move the good country people exceedingly. One called me a poor fatherless child; another exclaimed ‘What a pity! I had so much sense!’ and a third patted my head and ‘prayed God to preserve me, that I might make a good man.’

“And most of them contributed either by scraps of meat, farthings, bread and cheese or other homely offers, to enrich me, and send me a way with my pockets loaded. So by the time I got back to where my parents were camping I was quite tottering under the weight. I thought this would please my father but he was upset. Turning to my mother he exclaimed ‘This must not be! The poor child will become a common-place liar! A hedge-side rogue! He will learn to pilfer! Turn a confirmed vagrant! Go on the highway when he is older, and get hanged! He shall never go on such errands again’.

“From Newmarket we passed on to the Isle of Ely, hawking our different wares, pins, laces, tempting ribbons and garters, in every village we came to, always taking care to be present at Wisbech fair. We made friends with some of the other hawkers on the road, people like the cheapjack, Zita and her father with their horse-drawn van, packed full of brooms, brushes, doormats, coalscuttles and other essentials. They were professional sellers, that old man was a real character – a gaunt chap with bushy dark hair and sunken cheeks. He always looked the same, drab breeches and white stockings but with a bright floral waistcoat and that old plush caps with flaps that could be turned down on wet days. And although his voice was hoarse from bellowing he could flog anything. I saw him sell an old spy-glass that wouldn’t focus right, made everything look double; he told the lad that it looked back in time, so that when he viewed the front of Ely Cathedral and saw two transcepts he was seeing it like it had been before one fell down. Mind you it wasn’t the goods the lads came for – it was a glimpse of his daughter. I heard the old man died some years ago and Zita got mixed up in those Littleport riots but now she’s married and settled down and her son goes on the rounds with that old cart

“The marshy fen area was much infested by the reptile tribes. One day, as we were pushing though the grass by the road side, I saw what I imagined to be a beautiful ribbon, striped and spotted with various colours, but chiefly blue and white; and with great surprise, catching hold of my mother’s arm I cried ‘Look, mammy, look’. ‘Bless me’, said she, ‘how pretty’. Then stooping to take it up, she touched it; but our surprise greatly increased, when a large snake uncoiled itself, darted forward and in a moment was out of sight. That really scared mother – she’d seen that gravestone in Stretham churchyard to Sukey Brown, killed after she was bitten by a viper – the one that shows the girl sitting in her garden with the snake coiled around her leg

“But my father was much amused by the terror we felt: he knew the difference between the adder and common snake tribes. In summer and autumn, whenever he could come upon a sleeping snake, he’d make it his diversion to catch it by the tail, shake it when it attempted to rise, and bring it with him wherever he was going. Out in Wood Walton Fen I’ve seen ten or twelve yards of dyke white with snakes twenty deep, one over the other - they were attracted out of a plantation of dry sedge to look for frogs’ spawn. Country folk say that when snakes are active and always on the move its going to be very hot, but if you see them diving into rat holes or rabbit burrows then you can expect a cold, wet spell.

“In places snakes are so common that they can’t be kept out of the cottages, where they frequently take shelter, especially in the night. Adders are so frequent in parts of the fen they

pay people to kill them, so much each. They use them as cures and you'll sometimes see a chap, we call him the 'Duke of York', who earns his living by sitting on the steps of King's College Chapel with a bag of live snakes. He kills them and sells the skins - you bind them round your temple and they remedy every kind of pain in the head, or so he claims

"Once I saw a small snake with a golden ring around his neck but it slithered away before I could get it – now that would have been something I could have sold!"

[HOLCROFT, T. Memoirs PORTER, E. Cambridgeshire customs BARING GOULD. Cheap jack zita WRIGHT, Stretham notes DAY. History of the fens]

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Sam Brogden paused for effect, seeing the reaction to his stories of snakes, before continuing with his tale of Newmarket life. "I wondered if it might not be possible to procure the place of a stable-boy, at Newmarket. I was at this time in point of clothing in a very mean, not to say ragged condition, and stable-boys were healthy, clean, well fed, well clothed, and remarkable rather for their impudence, than seeming to live under any kind of fear or hardship. Except their impudence, I liked every thing else I saw about them; and decided that if I could obtain so high a situation, I should be very fortunate.

"Eventually I picked up the courage to mention this to my father; and he having a predilection for everything belonging to a horse, readily agreed. Having asked around amongst the jockeys he thought it advisable to apply to a Mr Woodcock, who kept stables four or five miles from Newmarket where he trained horses entrusted to his care. Mr. Woodcock examined me, asked my age, found I was light of weight, and, as I suppose liking the answers I gave to his questions, to my very great joy, agreed to take me upon trial.

"I was convinced that I should now be somebody. I should be entrusted with the management of one of that race of creatures that were the most admired and beloved by me: I should be well clothed, wear livery which would show I belonged to one of the great. I should not only have food enough, but of that kind which was highly relishing to the appetite of youth; and, in addition to all this, should receive annual stipend. I jumped from a precarious and mean existence, where I could not tell what worse might happen into a permanent and agreeable employment. I had only to learn to ride, and perform the duties of a stable boy, of which I had no fear, for I supposed them less difficult than I afterwards found they were.

"The grooms that reside in the vicinity of Newmarket are all more or, less acquainted with each other; and on Mr. Woodcock's recommendation, I was put under the care of Jack Clarke, who lived with Captain Vernon. Our first task was to take a horse to Mr Woodcock's stable. As is the custom in travelling with trained horses, we set off early, and walked without hurry. When we stopped to breakfast the plenty of excellent cold beef, bread and cheese, with the best table-beer, and as much as we pleased, gave me a foretaste of the fortunate change I had made. This indeed exceeded my utmost expectations - I was entering upon a new existence - was delighted, full of hope, and cheerful alacrity, yet too timid to be presumptuous.

"Then when we approached the residence I was amazed at such luxury, a grand house, surrounded by trees and with a line of stables. My old clothes were stripped from me, I was attired like a proper stableboy and taken across to be introduced to the family in their neat and spacious parlour. Mr Woodcock was not at home on my arrival but I met his wife, a superior woman dressed in white, and his charming young daughter, a neat fourteen-year-old girl. I soon got rather in favour with her; she would whisper with me when we met near the house, chide me if I did something wrong and once or twice even became quite angry. I thought I was settled for life, that I would marry the daughter and become a great man myself.

“I was entrusted with the care of a placid, grey filly, an wonderful animal. There was just one problem: I discovered that I could not ride. Although I could sit with seeming safety on a quiet horse, I did not know how to keep a firm seat and was almost certain of being thrown if anything that was but a little violent or uncommon happened. I was walking the filly quite a foot-pace in the forest, when in an instant something startled her, and made her spring aside by which I was unseated and thrown. And, unfortunately for me, my foot was caught up in the stirrup. Having this lump – myself - threshing around beneath her made the filly more frightened, she began to kick and plunge violently. I received a blow in the stomach, which freed me from the stirrup but left me, as was supposed for no inconsiderable time, dead. Another lad was riding with me dashed off to give the alarm. I was taken up, carried home, treated with great humanity and, by bleeding and other medical means, eventually brought back to life.

“All that I myself recollect of a circumstance so very serious, and so very near being mortal, was, that I was thrown, kicked, and dreadfully frightened; that some time afterwards I found myself very ill in bed, in a very neat chamber, and that I was spoken to and attended with great kindness till my recovery. This accident, however, put an end to my jockeyship in the service of Mr. Woodcock”

[T. Holcroft. Memoits. 1852]

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It was somewhat unfortunate, thought Pickwick, that a lad intending to make his way as a stableboy should not actually be able to ride. Following his disastrous fall from a gentle horse Sam Brogden had been turned away from Mr Woodock’s stables near Newmarket. But it was not the end of his career, as he explained:

“Although he turned me away, he did not desert me. He recommended me to the service of a little deformed groom, remarkably long in the fork, of the name of Johnstone, who was esteemed an excellent rider, and had a string of no less than thirteen famous horses, the property of the Duke of Grafton, under his care. I was taken on, but not for long.

On my first morning a horse that I was riding merely shook himself in his saddle and I fell from his back as much terrified as if he had been rearing, plunging, and kicking. To the other grooms, boys that delight in playing the braggart, this was a truly ridiculous instance of cowardice, and was repeated with no little malignity and laughter. It reached the ears of Mr Johnstone and as soon as he discovered that I had all my trade to learn I was again dismissed. He told me I must endeavour to get a place, but for his part he could say little in my favour; however he did suffer me to remain a few days among the boys.

“Then in the very height of my distress, I heard that Mr. John Watson, training and riding groom to Captain Vernon, a gentleman of acute notoriety on the turf, was in want of but just then found it difficult to procure, a stable-boy. This was a worry for though he was one of the first grooms in Newmarket and was remarkable for being good-tempered yet the manner in which he disciplined his boys, though mild, was effectual, and few were in better repute. One consequence of this, however, was that if any lad was dismissed by John Watson it was not easy for him to find a place anywhere else

“I decided to take a chance and had a great stoke of fortune, for Jack Clarke, the groom who had first looked after me, was then working for him. Under his guidance it was no difficult matter to meet with Mr Watson; he was so attentive to stable-hours, that he was always to be

found there. Being first careful to make myself look as much like a stableboy as I could, I arrived at the hour
of four, which is the summer hour for opening the afternoon stables, giving a slight feed of oats, and going out to evening exercise, and ventured to ask if I could see John Watson.

"Straightway he came up to me with a serious, but good-natured countenance, and accosted me first with, 'Well, my lad, what is your business? I suppose I can guess; you want a place? Who have you lived with?' I told him it was Mr. Woodcock, on the forest. 'How came you to leave Mr. Woodcock?' This was the question I'd been dreading but I decided to tell the truth: 'I had a fall from an iron-grey filly, that almost killed me and he turned me away sir'. It paid off: 'That is honest; I like your speaking the truth. So you are come from him to me?'

At this question I cast my eyes down, and hesitated, then fearfully answered, 'No, sir'. 'No! What, change masters twice in so short a time?' 'I can't help it, sir, if I am turned away'. This last answer made him smile. When I explained my situation he understood: 'Well, as you have been so short a time in the stables, I am not surprised he should turn you away; he would have every body about him as clever as himself; they must all know their business thoroughly. However, they must learn it somewhere.

"Then told me to walk up and down in front of him", and Brogden he rose from his chair to demonstrate. "As you may note I am somewhat bow-legged, turn in my toes and my knees stick out. This was what he was looking for". He told me 'Boys with straight legs, small calves and knees that project but little seldom become excellent riders. I will venture to give you a trial. Come tomorrow morning at nine'

"I danced back home to Jack and told him I would be paid four guineas a year, with the usual livery clothing. And he being a good-tempered lad, and seeing me happy, he gave me all the caution and advice he could, and warned me of the deceptions, most of them nasty, many of them unhealthy, practised by stable-lads upon every newcomer".

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Brogden described his life as a Newmarket stable-boy:

"All the boys in the stable rise at the same hour, from half-past two in spring, to between four and five in the depth of winter. The horses hear them and neigh to denote their eagerness to be fed. Being dressed, the boy begins with carefully clearing out the manger, and giving a feed of oats, which he is obliged no less carefully to sift. He then proceeds to dress the litter; that is, to shake the bed on which the horse has been lying, remove whatever is wet or unclean, and keep the remaining straw in the stable for another time. The whole stables are then thoroughly swept, the few places for fresh air are kept open, the great heat of the stable gradually cooled, and the horse, having ended his first feed, is roughly cleaned and dressed. In about half an hour all the horses have been rubbed down and reclothed, saddled and turned in his stall

"Then they are bridled, mounted, and the whole string goes out to morning exercise. A racehorse never trots: he must either walk or gallop. When the horses are in full exercise the gallop begins slowly and gradually, and increases till the horse is nearly at full speed. After he has galloped half-a-mile, the boy begins to push him forward, without relaxation, for another half-mile. This is what they call the first brushing gallop when the horses are nearly at full speed before it is over, and it is commonly made at last rather up hill. Having pulled up the horses stand some or three minutes and recover their wind; they then leisurely descend the hill and take a long walk; after which they are brought to water. But every thing is measured. The boy counts the number of times the horse swallows when he drinks, and allows him to take no more gulps than the groom orders. After watering, a gentle gallop is taken, and after

that, another walk of considerable length before the second and last brushing gallop, which is by far the most severe. When it is over they are allowed a pause to recover their wind before the last walk is begun which ends in a ride homewards. The morning's exercise often extends to four hours

“Being once in the stable; each lad begins his labour. He leads the horse into his stall, ties him up, rubs down his legs with straw, takes off his saddle and body clothes, curries him carefully. With both currycomb and brush he never leaves him till he has so thoroughly cleaned his skin that neither spot nor wet, nor any appearance of neglect may be seen about him. The horse is then reclothed, and allowed to rest for some time, which is first employed in gratifying his hunger, and recovering from his weariness. All this is performed, and the stables are once more shut up, about nine o'clock.

“Accustomed to this life, the boys are very little overcome by fatigue, except that early in the morning they may be drowsy. I have sometimes fallen slightly asleep at the beginning of the first brushing gallop. But if the ladds are not weary, they are hungry, and they make themselves ample amends for all they have done. Nothing perhaps can exceed the enjoyment of a stable-boy's breakfast of new milk, or milk porridge, then the cold meat of the preceding day, most exquisite Gloucester cheese, fine white bread, all concluded with plentiful draughts of table-beer. Then they might sometimes take a nap for an hour, after so small a portion of sleep.

“From nine o'clock in the morning till four, the whole time is at the boy's own disposal. Boys, when at full liberty, and thus kept in health and exercise are eager at play. The games most common at Newmarket were fives, spell and null, marbles, chuck-farthing, and spinning tops.

“But in summer, spring, and autumn, the stables are again opened at four, and woe to him who is absent! The business to be done in the afternoon is but a repetition, with little or no variety, of that of the morning except that they return to the stables at seven, or rather earlier. Once again the lads dress their horses, give them a first feed, go to supper themselves, give them a second feed, prepare the horses’ beds, pick and prepare the hay with which they sup. While the horse has his last feed of oats, in the centre of his smooth, carefully made bed of clean long straw, the weary boy will often lie down by the side of him. Were he to lie even till morning, the horse would never lie down himself, but stand still, careful to do his keeper no harm. But the boy must keep awake, not for fear of the horse, but of the mischievous disposition of his comrades. Then by nine o’clock the stables are once more shut up, containing both horses and boys, both snoring.”

[Thos Holcroft Memoirs]

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Sam Brogden enjoyed the life of a Newmarket stable boy; the only problems were other stable boys, and horses

His troubles had started on the day he commenced at John Watson’s stables; at first the other lads had seemed friendly, for had he not arrived at a most appropriate time. They needed his help in rescuing an owl that had become trapped inside one of the barns, having flown in while the doors were open. Having watched for some days they were convinced that it had found a roost in the corner and could be glimpsed peaking his head out of a hole. Only somebody unafraid of climbing a high ladder could rescue it.

“I thought I could not resist such a challenge and so impress my new friends. I clambered up a most rickety muck-splattered ladder, which swayed alarmingly beneath me, into the cobweb-festooned darkness of the ancient timbered roof. I peeked into the hole but could see nothing,

then removed my hat, put it over the hole and stood ready. You never heard such a cacophony of noise, when the other lads hooted and hallooed to scare the bird off his perch and into the hat. My legs started to tremble, making the ladder shudder even more. Then I distinctly heard a noise, not from inside the hole but from higher up in the rafters. I lifted my head just in time to spot one of the other lads holding a very large bucket which I quickly learned was filled with the most pungent liquid, for he poured the whole contents down on me. My legs buckled, the ladder slipped and down I went into a large pile of very soiled hay and horse droppings."

Even after all the years Brogden still shuttered at the recollection and the shame he had felt to have been the butt of such malicious humour. But it had not prevented him carrying out the same trick on other youngsters after him.

Nor was this the only time he was fooled. "They told me I was now initiated as a stable boy and entitled to wear the accepted uniform of which the most important element was the waistcoat. This was also a mark of the jockeys who could be seen walking for ten miles along the Dullingham Road wearing six of them, together with three pairs of drawers, in an attempt to sweat off the ever-encroaching extra ounces.

"When they said that I was gaining weight – well I was now eating good meals for the first time in my life – I was encouraged to do the same. After the morning training session I borrowed about eight waistcoats, each slightly larger than the other, and squeezed myself into them. Then I set off on a three mile run, coming back hot and sweaty and ready for the next essential part of the process, the same one favoured by the grooms. I stripped stark naked and plunged myself into a steaming hot dung heap. It was not an unpleasant experience in a funny way, until I became aware of faces at every window, even those of young ladies, laughing at me for being such a fool. As I struggled out of the muck, endeavouring to hide my embarrassment, as you might say, I was drenched again with another pail of that strongly-smelling liquid.

But it was the horses that were more mischievous. "The blood-horses have different temperaments and habits. The majority of them are playful but their gambols are dangerous to the timid or unskilful. They are all easily and suddenly alarmed and when anything they do not understand forcibly catches their attention they are to be feared even by good horsemen. But beside their general disposition to playfulness there is a great propensity in them to become vicious. High bred, hot in blood and with their tender skins subjected to sharp curry-combing and hard brushing they frequently become irritated and will watch their opportunity to bite, stamp or kick.

"I was with Tom Clarke who was sweating a grey horse that belonged to Lord March; while he was scraping him that horse turned, seized him by the shoulder, lifted him off the ground and carried him for two or three hundred yards before he loosened his hold. The poor lad was severely injured and after that nobody else dared go near for he would run at anybody who approached in the paddock and kick and assault anybody within reach in the stable.

"Such vicious snarling, spitting and biting brutes – and by this I mean both horse and stable lad alike – were not for me. I left my post and went to seek my fortune in the racing industry elsewhere."

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Although Sam Brogden had ceased to work with horses he still kept a very sharp eye on anything relating to them, especially those important members of the Newmarket community who actually rode the beasts.

The most celebrated amongst the Newmarket horse society were the Chifneys whose sumptuous residences built for them by the Duke of Cleveland were an incentive to every ambitious jockey. The dynasty had started when Old Sam Chifney came to the racing stables at Newmarket from Norfolk. He was about five foot five inches in height, and of perfect symmetry; muscular and powerful, yet a light-weight. He had a unique riding style that contributed to his success: he had a theory that the weight should be shifted at different times in a race, and would alter his seat, leaning back or slightly forward or even standing in the stirrups. He soon achieved such a reputation that the Duke of Bedford would refuse to match a horse against one ridden by him, without receiving an allowance of weight. But there was another reason why other owners would not race him.

Old Sam had started life as a regular jockey in the service of Mr. Panton but was then retained by the Prince of Wales at a salary of £200 a year. The Prince was a regular attender at Newmarket and built up both a circle of friends and a reputation for his horse breeding. Between 1784 and 1792 his horses won 185 races, bringing him 32,688 guineas to say nothing of plates and cups. But then came the scandal.

One of the Prince's favourite horses, 'Escape', was entered for two races at the October meeting in 1791. The first was against three other runners for a purse of 60 guineas. With old Sam Chifney in the saddle the Prince's horse started as favourite but came in last. It was the talk of the town, but the defeat of a favourite is nothing new. However the next day there were six starters, including two who had beaten Escape previously. This was reflected in the betting, though Old Sam, again the jockey, had faith in his mount and backed it to the sum of twenty guineas. When the horse romped home easily there was a royal row and both Old Sam and the Prince himself were openly accused of deliberately losing the previous race.

The Jockey Club took up the matter and Sir Charles Bunbury sent His Highness a message to say that if ever he allowed Chifney to ride his horses in future then no gentleman would start against him. The Prince refused to make a scapegoat of his jockey but gave orders that his conduct be rigorously investigated. As for himself, he sold up his Newmarket stud and never returned to the town.

Old Sam protested his innocence but found it hard to convince his detractors. He left Newmarket in 1804 to live in London on the pension of two hundred guineas granted him by royal benevolence. But this was woefully insufficient for a man who had tasted fame and luxury; he got into debt and came to a sad end in the Fleet Prison in 1807, being buried in the Holborn Churchyard of St. Sepulchre. But it was not the end of the Chifneys and Newmarket.

Old Sam had married the daughter of a training groom and had bred six children, of whom the two most notable were Will and Young Sam. Will, the elder, was destined to be a trainer, so his education was turned in that direction and he was instructed in the most minute details of stable lore. Old Sam's great desire was to bequeath the whip and reins that he had handled with such skill to the keeping of another Sam Chifney so Young Sam was initiated into the mysteries of race riding. When the boy was barely three stone, he would slip off to the stables with him and, putting a racing saddle on one of the horses, would instruct him by the hour in the art of sitting and holding the reins. As the boy grew older he would take him up and, under cover of the fir clump on the Warren Hill and lay out a 300-yard course. Here Old Sam on his hack, and Young Sam on his pony, would go through every phase of racing, including the 'Chifney rush'.

At the age of thirteen the boy was sent to live with his maternal uncle, then private trainer to the Earl of Oxford at Brampton Park in Oxfordshire. But when two years he was appointed trainer to the Prince of Wales so Young Sam followed his father by riding in the royal colours. Soon however he was back at Newmarket and attached to Perren's stable, where he became reunited with his bother Will. But then, still smarting under the stigma of the Escape

tragedy, Will wreaked his vengeance on Colonel Leigh, the Equerry to the Prince, and knocked him down in the High Street at Newmarket, for which demonstration he was awarded six months in the prison at Cambridge. The Colonel, however was a good sort and after Will's release from jail a firm friendship sprang up between the two

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The two Chifney brothers, Young Sam and Will were at the zenith of their fame and fortune, dominating the Newmarket racing scene, as Brogden explained:

"Young Sam has assumed the Royal jacket, previously worn by his late father, and also rides for all the best patrons of Perren's stables. They include Squire Thornhill, for whom he won the 1818 Derby, and Lord Darlington: Will trains for him, Sam rides his horses and both often visit Yorkshire for several days' hunting with the Earl's celebrated pack.

"Ten years ago, in 1828, they brought out a great horse of their own named Zinganee. It was a favourite for the Derby but something went amiss in the lead-up to the great race and it came in third. Unkind voices reawakened memories of the scandal affecting Old Sam and the King and everybody watched its next major outing with interest. Young Sam was on its back as it romped home to victory in the Ascot Gold Cup, but the horse was not his: the night before the race he'd sold it to Lord Chesterfield for 2,500 guineas.

"But their best horse was Priam. I first saw it on that July morning in 1828 when the Chifneys went out on Warren Hill to cast their eye over some yearlings which Sir John Shelley had sent up for sale. They'd heard a rumour of a very fine colt being among them and the very moment they saw the horse they determined to have him at any price. He was quite unbroken, and his reserve was 950 guineas but Mr. Tattersall knocked him down to Will's bid of 1,000 guineas.

"And this was Priam! A dark bay, whose best points were his magnificent forehand and beautiful blood-like head. Good judges held the most varied opinions about this colt: Lord Darlington was prejudiced at once against him, and thought he would never stay a Derby course, Lord Chesterfield on the other hand declared that on looks he was the best blood-horse he had ever seen. But the Chifneys were in no hurry to text his prowess until the 1830 Craven Meeting at Epson.

"But how were they to get there – they walked! Now a journey of this sort is fraught with danger; it can lame a horse for life to travel such distances, to say nothing of the diseases it can pick up in the unhealthy stabling of the various inns on the road where it has to stay the night. But this is what the horses are trained to do: take the case of Mr John Scott's 'Cyprian'. She walked from Malton to Epson and won the Oaks in 1836 and then went all the way up to Newcastle to win the Northumberland Plate, taking nearly a month to cover the 300 miles between.

"Will and Priam allowed themselves plenty of time. They started from Newmarket for Epsom on the Friday week before the Derby and got to Newport, twenty-one miles from home, on the first day. On Saturday the procession reached the Cock at Epping, and on Sunday morning, long before the churchgoers had come out, they passed down Piccadilly, and reached Smith's stables in Sloane Street. A few select friends had been informed of their arrival and the sporting elite of London turned out to see them.

"But as the day of the race dawned there was a controversy: who was to be its jockey? Young Sam was already committed to ride for Lord Darlington, and nothing would induce his Lordship to let him off. Eventually the green and black cap of the Chifney family was

entrusted to a jockey named Samuel Day and the scandal-mongers had another field day as Young Sam found himself having to race against his own horse.

"Twenty-three horses started, several times; eventually they did get away and Priam was the last off, dropping back several lengths. But he was up with them at the corner and came through in a storming final run to win by two lengths and bring the Chifneys some £12,000. It was the horse's finest race; it was beaten by half a length by Birmingham in the St. Leger, the course being under water. The brothers sold it to Lord Chesterfield for 3,000 guineas and it proved a shrewd buy as he later sold it for 3,500 guineas to go to stud in America.

"The brothers have their sumptuous Newmarket residences and Young Sam also has a very well-appointed stud farm called Fidget Farm just beyond the Bury Hill Gallop where he keeps a celebrated breed of Vauxhall Clarke game fowl and a small plantain fenced in with wire enclosing an artificial earth consecrated to his pet foxes. But he's turned lazy and refuses remunerative mounts from mere indolence and they say Will has got into financial difficulties – we shall have to wait and see."

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Though the trainers and jockeys were amongst the most important people in Newmarket there was, as Brogden explained, one who brought more happiness and despair to far more people – William Crockford, the gambling-hell proprietor epitomised as more machine than man, with

'…. nought but calculation in his brain,
And nought revolving, save the way to gain.'

He'd begun life as a small fishmonger, and even among the fins and scales he displayed a youthful genius for speculation. He frequently went to Billingsgate and bought a whole bench of fish on a day when he anticipated a rapid retail increase in demand, so making a corner in haddocks, so to speak. These gains he carried to a hazard table in King Street, St. James's, with varying, but indifferent success, until on one lucky day a casual tip on a Derby outsider started his wheel of fortune. He deserted the fish shop, which adjoined Temple Bar, and set forth on a new venture.

Various partners associated themselves with his gambling enterprises and he struck lucky – in one session of twenty-four hours' sitting he took £100,000 from Lords Thanet and Granville, Mr. Ball Hughes and two other gentlemen. He soon became proprietor of Fielder's Gambling House in St. James's Street, and amassed enough money to build a palace in St. James's Street, the decorations alone of which are said to have cost £94,000. When this opened as a club in 1827 there were about 1,200 members, exclusive of ambassadors and foreigners of distinction, each paying an annual subscription of £25. Even the Duke of Wellington has been elected a member.

But even before this he'd moved into Newmarket. About 1809 he purchased Mr. Panton's house in the High Street. Then within two years he invested in racehorse, Sultan, who came second in the Derby of 1819. But he soon realised that racing was not his *forte,* and his particular genius lay in his knowledge of human weakness. . . horses were but means to an end; his Turf ventures were successful only in the measure in which he applied to them his accumulated experience of the gambling tables.
He bought another place across the road which he converted into a gambling den and there he sits, snug and sly, in the corner of the room, attracting, rejecting, sifting the doubtful from the desirable, giving credit only to signatures of such gentlemen as can afford to lose. Not that he is too careful with his money – I've known people going into it and picking up sovereigns from the floor after a big hazard night.

Vast sums of money pass hands over an individual race but five years ago there was something slightly different to bet upon: Squire Osbaldeston undertook to ride 200 miles in nine hours on the Heath for a wager of 1,000 guineas a side with Mr. Charite.

The morning broke raw and wet, but at seven o'clock the two gentlemen and their two umpires made their way to the Ditch Stand, the watches were set and locked up, and at thirteen minutes past seven 'the Squire' started on his journey. He rode in a black velvet cap, purple silk jacket and doeskins, his waist encircled with a whalebone riding belt. His saddles were covered with lambskin, and he rode with very short stirrup leathers.

The course was four miles, mostly over the Round Course, and he changed horses on completing each four miles, taking no refreshment till after the 14th and 25th rounds, and then only a mouthful of bread and a little brandy and water. The 26th round was his fastest, covering the four miles in eight minutes, which is remarkable galloping. After 120 miles in five hours eight minutes, and wet to the skin, he dismounted for six minutes, during which he partook of cold partridge and weak brandy and water. Then in spite of driving wind and rain, at nine minutes to four he had won his wager, having ridden the 200 miles in eight hours, thirty-nine minutes including stoppages.

There were so many spectators his supporters had trouble making room for him to dismount. But the Squire was marvellously tough and fit. There was no question of a post- chaise, smelling-salts, or restoratives of any kind; he just mounted his favourite hack Cannon Ball and, followed by every horseman on the ground, galloped back at a slashing pace to his lodgings at Perrin's in the town, where, after a hot bath and a couple of hours' rest, he was up again and enjoying a good dinner.

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There was another name associated with Newmarket – that of Tattersall; the founder of the firm, Richard Tattersall was a Yorkshireman who migrated down to London and became intensely interested in horses, taking charge of the Duke of Kingston's stud and so making the acquaintance of many racing men.

In those days there was no horse repository where fixed sales were held at regular periods so Richard offered his services as an auctioneer. The first Tattersall premises were built with the backing of Lord Grosvenor on a piece of open land he owned at Hyde Park Corner. Soon the hares which formerly gambolled on the spot were displaced by buildings including kennels for hounds, stables for the sale of carriages and a house in which the Jockey Club had two rooms, elegantly fitted up for their use.

As the business prospered Tattersall used frequently to purchase whole studs of horses, both on commission and as a private speculation. One of the first of these transactions took place on a journey to Scotland with the sale of the stud of a certain nobleman and some of these horses were sold at a profit in York, London & Newmarket. With these deals and the London business he soon became prosperous;

But his supreme triumph was the purchase of the horse with which the name of Tattersall is so intimately associated: Highflyer, as Brogden explained

"Highflyer was bred by Lord Bolingbroke but his affairs were in an very unsettled state, and indeed his Lordship was considerably in debt to Mr. Tattersall. So to ensure he at least would be paid Tattersall went down in the night to Newmarket, seized the horse, and, clapped a double lock upon him. Some say Highflyer was a dear bargain at £800 but I think he was the cheapest horse that I either saw or heard of. He ran eight times and was never beaten

“Then when his racing days were done he had amazing success at the stud. Of course the question of breeding from these great sires is very tense, but Mr. Tattersall had an incomparable grasp of the principles of breeding thoroughbred stock. With Colonel O'Kelly, the owner of the great Eclipse, Tattersall acquired all the Eclipse bred mares he could lay his hands on for Highflyer and derived a large income from the sale of his progeny,

“In view of the money he made out of that horse it’s no surprise that Old Tatt worshipped Highflyer. He’d long wanted to establish a stud near Newmarket, so he eventually selected a farm of some 600 acres of excellent grassland one-mile from the town of Ely. There he built a residence that he called ‘Highflyer Hall’ where he gave annual dinners for the Newmarket jockey and frequently entertained the Prince Regent . There were many a tale of their adventures and stories of a post-chaise being driven into Newmarket full gallop in the early hours of the morning containing Mr. Tattersall with His Royal Highness riding one of the leaders, and Charles James Fox a wheeler.

“When Highflyer died, in his twentieth year, Tattersall had him buried with a memorial stone inscribed: ‘Here lieth the perfect and beautiful symmetry of the much lamented Highflyer, by whom and his wonderful offspring the celebrated Tattersall acquired a noble fortune, but was not ashamed to acknowledge it’. But after Richard died in 1795 his son Edmund broke off his connection with the turf and sold off the breeding stud. Now there’s another Richard Tattersall – his grandson – in charge of the firm and they’ve gone back into the breeding business.

“But this present Richard seems more keen on portraits of horses rather than the animals themselves and has compiled several volumes of engravings, including many of Highflyer’s offspring. Now I know many people decry such coloured prints as vulgar and never to be found in the portfolios of men of taste. But I’ve seen them and they are of the highest quality; they combine the skill of the best engravers with that the greatest artists. And horse-portraiture has improved greatly – just consider the work of George Stubb: his horses are not wooden beasts but flesh and blood, why even in the first Tattersall’s time he was asking 150 guineas a picture. Now we have young John Herring, he learned his trade painting inn signs and cattle, then progressed to hunters and coaching-scenes till he earned enough to move to Fulbourn, nearly 20 years since, and has really made his mark with portraits of racehorses.”

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Brogden paused for breath, and turned to Pickwick: “You, sir are a London gentleman. Have you met this new Queen, Victoria, because the future of Newmarket rests on her shoulders. You see in recent years the town has gone right down and we need a Queen to revive the ‘sport of Kings’.

“It was the first King James who put Newmarket on the map; he was on his way to Thetford when he spotted a hare as he was passing through Fordham and gave chase. He ended up killing not one but six, and then he heard there were bustards too, and racing on the heath. This was sport indeed, so he came back time and again - so much so that his subjects complained he was spending too much time in hunting and not enough on the affairs of state.

“Of course King James needed somewhere to stay so he took lodgings at the Griffin Inn, he liked it so much that he ended up buying the place. But you can’t have a king staying in a tavern so he decided to build himself somewhere else. Not that he was much of a builder, in 1613 the foundations of the house began to sink on one side so much that the doors and the windows flew open and he had to be hastily removed from his bed and taken to Thetford.

“It didn’t put him off so he built himself another Palace where he conducted his Royal duties and squabbled with his parliament whilst finding time for his main love of sport. But as his health failed so Newmarket became a place for rest and recovery and it was from here that he made his final journey back towards London, only to die en route.

“While James loved riding he did not ride very well and was nearly drowned through being thrown into a pond, but his successor the first King Charles was far more adept. As his realm fell apart he continued his love of Newmarket and its sport, introducing rules to prevent poaching by prohibiting innkeepers from dressing or selling venison, hare or partridge – though such animals graced the royal table in abundance. Meanwhile more money was being expended on improvements to the Palace – a tennis court, sewers, an altar for his Catholic queen’s chapel. Although located in a dirty street, without any fine avenue approaching it the building became very grand with sumptuous decorations, a fine Jacobean staircase and panelling purloined from some other Palace.

“It was not to last; when his Newmarket holiday of 1642 was interrupted by more complaints from Parliament, he was particularly annoyed and by the time he returned again, four years later, he was a prisoner of Parliament, having lost his war against them. For a few weeks he enjoyed his old pleasures until he lost not his temper, but his head.

“Although the puritans appreciated the benefits of good horsemanship on the battlefield they did not appreciate the intricacies of horse racing nor the beauty of the King’s Palace so both fell into disuse. But when a new monarch, the second Charles, succeeded to the throne then Newmarket itself was too small to cater for all entourage. Even after the Palace itself was rebuilt it provided too little accommodation for the retinue who had to be billeted in country seats around and about. When the court came racing the heath was covered in tents that gave little protection to the fine courtiers from the dampness of a spring morning.

“Despite this Newmarket became the centre of court life, scandals and intrigues, with not only a Queen but also various Royal Mistresses including young Nell Gwynn, to keep the tongues wagging, and again it became the centre of horseracing and other entertainment. After the dark days of Puritanism the town regained its place as the centre for enjoyment::

‘A hound and a hawk no longer shall
Be token of disaffection;
A cockfight shall cease
To be a breach of the peace,
And a horse race an insurrection’

“Those were the days of greatness, when sport and gambling flourished and there was money to be made – we need Victoria to bring them back”

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During the heady days of King Charles II Newmarket and its sport had flourished like never before, as Brogden explained. Charles could hold his own with the best in the land, be it at tennis, pall mall, fishing, walking – but especially at riding, being the only King to actually win a race at Newmarket. Indeed His Majesty acquired a nickname, ‘Old Rowley’ after his favourite horse and that name in turn was applied to ‘the Rowley Mile’

Nor was his sport limited to that indulged in the open air as many a lady and many a scandal gave testimony. But what was permitted a King was unacceptable in others and he took the time to legislate against misbehaviour by Cambridge undergraduates. Many a student had taken a shine to many an inn-keeper’s daughter and too often the result had been either a baby

or an inappropriate wedding; the King's remedy was simple – such woman were to be expelled from Cambridge and shunted at least four miles outside the town.

Sadly the ordinary everyday affairs of the nation, his subjects or international diplomacy had a habit of intruding into the sporting life. Numerous Ambassadors, Mayors and diplomats made the journey to Newmarket and waited their turn for an audience. Even the King's son, James, who had been banished the realm because of his refusal to abandon the Roman Catholic faith was invited back to the races and welcomed with feasting and rejoicing. It was here too that another Royal Prince, William of Orange, journeyed seeking a sneak look at the woman who had been prepared as his intended bride, the Princess Mary of York. So important was this that Charles actually left Newmarket early to escort William to Whitehall and effect the introduction that was to result in marriage.

Even the great fire in 1683 could not deter the King from attending the races, although the town was in such a state that the court ladies had to be left behind. It was to be His Majesty's penultimate visit and folks feared the good times were over.

His successor, the catholic second King James did not come racing before he was ousted but his replacement on the throne, William of Orange knew and enjoyed the sport of Kings. He made his initial journey all the way from Hampton Court in a single day and once more Newmarket became the centre of court life. Later Queen Anne continued the tradition of royal patronage, giving money to pave the streets and rebuild the Royal residence.

Since then the Palace had enjoyed mixed fortunes; the Prince of Wales inhabited it at various intervals and when he left Newmarket in disgust after his disagreement with the Jockey Club it was lived in by his equerry. By 1819 the building was put on the market, advertised as being suitable as the residence of any family of distinction – well, despite its shabby appearance it had been good enough for a King!

And it was bought by a King-in-waiting – the Prince Regent who gave orders that the poor old mutilated palace should be renovated. Various walls were rebuilt and the three water-closets that had been erected about half-way up like three cages hung upon a wall were removed. But all in all this Royal Residence now very much resembles a lunatic asylum.

There have been other building too; the Jockey Club have been busy improving their building, the former Coffee House, which turns its back to the street; it is large, plain and neat enough but really not grand enough for its purpose. But we have just got a new Union Workhouse on four acres of land in Exning Road and this will soon be the most important house in the town.

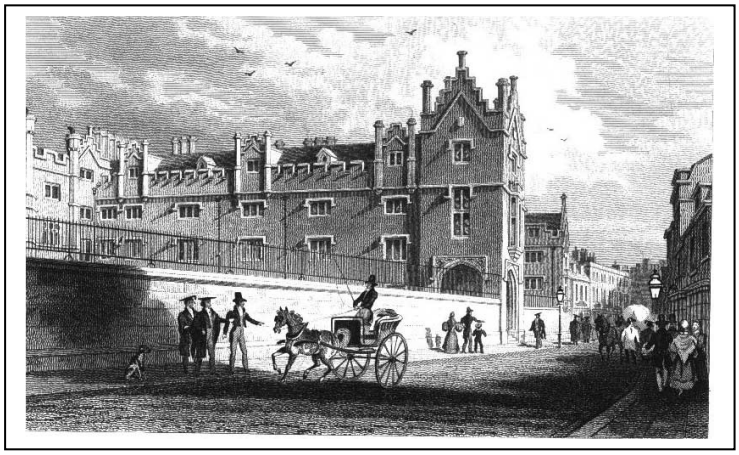
Between 1788 and 1832 some 42 Derby winners hailed from Newmarket but in the last five years there's been scarcely any, and the number of people attending meetings has dropped, so that Brogden feared for the future of the town. They'd tried all things keep the sport going but the prize money varies.

You see John Perran from Cheveley left a will in which he directed that the sum of £21 should be given to any parishioner of Newmarket All Saints who married a woman from the same place on the Thursday of Easter Week. Neither of them had to be under 20, nor older than 25, nor to have £20 to their name. You can appreciate that this attracted a considerable interest and there can be severalc couples coming forward to book a wedding on that day. But if nobody is eligible for the money it goes to the winner of the Town Plate!

By the time Pickwick bad farewell to his friends at the University Arms and made his way across the road to his rooms at the Castle Inn he was ready for a good night's sleep. He woke refreshed, determined to explore more of this university town of Cambridge.

The morning was bright, the streets were busy and he turned left out of the door of the Inn towards the town centre. He passed the gate of Christ's College without pausing, having no wish to impose himself once more on Dr Gunning. He skirted the Holy Trinity and All Saint's churches without being accosted by any of his clerical acquaintances and was soon approaching that college he had been warned not to enter, Sidney Sussex.

Certainly Pickwick had no wish to be harangued by Dr Chafy, the bullying Master but on the other hand the gate was open and there was nobody much about. He was picking up his courage to enter when he noticed an elderly gentleman departing. This was obviously no academic figure so he sought his advice.



"God bless you sir, you'd be most welcome to go in. They're as nice a group of Fellows as you'd be likely to meet this side of King's Parade, and they stood by me when others would have made me out a liar and a fool – just because I can't read."

His acquaintance introduced himself as William Parkinson, college watchman. "I started at Sidney Sussex back in the May of 1812, just after the first of the fires – you'll remember the story?"

Pickwick confessed he did not, so Parkinson retold a tale he'd obviously told before several times.

"Just before midnight it was in the April of 1812, the college was found to be on fire in two separate places, luckily they put it out in time so no great damage was done. But it worried the Fellows, because they were sure it was done deliberate, so they put up a reward of £200 and the University came in with another £300 to anybody who could name the incendiarist. It didn't do any good, because three weeks later there was another fire in an uninhabited room in the upper part of the south wing, and this time there was considerable damage

"I was working at St John's College at the time but when I heard that Sidney wanted a night watchman I thought I'd have a change and started that May, that was the year before Dr Chafy was appointed Master.

"Things were more relaxed in those days but there was something not quite right. In January the University confers its Bachelor of Arts degrees on the senior students and the new B.A.s dine with the Fellows in the Combination Room. It was a pleasant enough affair by all accounts but at the end, when most had left, then one of the students, Mr Kendall, started to complain that he'd been overlooked for an honour because people suspected that it had been him who'd started the fires. He got most upset and stormed out of the college, ranting and raving.

"I didn't know anything about that, not at the time, but I was on the gate and had to let him back in, about half-past-ten. He started on to me, 'Am I a devil?', he asked. I said 'I hope not, sir'. 'Then I'm the son of a devil' – and he gave me a shilling and told me to go out and get drunk. I thanked him for the bob but said I had to do my duty. 'Duty be damn'd. This is a holiday night, you must not mind duty tonight' he said.

“As it happens Scott the porter’s young woman was in the lodge at the time, she’d come to bring the keys, and she heard everything that was said, and she was with me when I told the Fellows and Master of Magdalene next day. It was all written down, proper. Not what that helped me much!”

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William Parkinson, watchman at Sidney Sussex College had been on duty on the evening of 23rd January 1812 when Frederick Kendall had come in late, acting oddly. He’d thought little of it – newly-graduated young men were entitled to celebrate in any way they chose.

He recounted what transpired next: “I stayed in the porter’s lodge for about half an hour and then heard somebody calling out that there was a fire in Mr Charles Shrubsole Bonnett’s rooms in the stable yard. He’s a fellow commoner. I ran up to his rooms, then back to the Porter’s lodge to fetch the keys.

“When Rev Walter Gee heard the cry ‘fire’ he ran to his own rooms for water, pulling the door shut behind him when he left, but it didn’t latch properly. He met Mr Kendall on the stair, which was odd because Mr Bonnett’s rooms are at one end of the yard and the Rev Gee’s at the other, with Mr Kendall’s in between.

“When the fire was extinguished I went into stable yard to ensure that part of the college was safe; Mr Gee’s rooms are over the passage and obvious to the eye – there was no light showing in his windows. On my return, as the gate moved very stiffly I was obliged to slam it with some violence and it made a noise

“I heard somebody rush out of Rev Gee’s rooms and come down the stairs; his foot slipped and he fell with some force against the opposite wall. I recognised Mr Kendall – I was within two yards of him. I saw him plain in the light of the lamp; he was dressed in a loose drab great coat and he ran to his own staircase. I called out ‘I have found the man! Here is Mr Kendall’

“Mr Peck, a college servant came out of Kendall’s staircase where he’d stood all the time and together we went to Gee’s staircase. I looked up and saw a blaze at the windows. We found the window curtain had fallen and was burning on the floor; the lamp in the staircase hangs by the door – it’s a glass lamp which can be easily opened. Fortunately we soon had the fire put out.

“Many people ran to Kendall’s rooms; he was agitated and said he’d been in bed – but the bed was untouched. He was still wearing that drab coat I’d seen him in, though Peck told me he’d seen him on the staircase leading to Mr Bonnett’s rooms before that caught fire wearing a blue uniform - the clothes he’d worn to the celebration dinner.

“Everybody was very excited, we were talking and telling what we’d seen, but the Fellows decided it ought to be set down while it was fresh in our minds. I told them everything, including how Scott’s woman had heard what passed in the lodge and had seen and heard all. It was written down by Mr Statham, a fellow-commoner and I put my mark on it. Now I can’t read or write but I’m sure I said how I’d ran after Kendall and called out

“Next day Kendall was committed before the Vice Chancellor, the Master of Magdalene, and I was examined and questioned again about what I’d seen and done. Well it was an open and shut case and so in the March it came to court. But then it all went wrong. I told the facts – as I’ve told them to you - but then the defence lawyer, the Solicitor General, started to have a go

at me. He questioned this and that, made out black was white, sometimes making little jokes, then getting stern till I didn't know what I was saying – after all I'm not an educated man.

"And that was my downfall. He produced my statement and asked could I recognise my mark, but one mark is much like another. And when he read it then those words about me seeing Kendall and him slipping over was not in it. He said what I'd testified in court was different to what I'd said on the night and called me an unreliable witness. So the judge dismissed all my evidence and said the jury must acquit the prisoner. But had the case continued then Scott's girl would have backed me up, and two other college servants definitely heard me say 'Here is Mr Kendall'. I couldn't understand it, I'm sure I said it and it can only be that Mr Statham forgot to write them words down, or somebody switched documents.

"But the Master and Fellows believed me and have retained me in their confidential service while Mr Kendall's names was immediately erased from the college boards and a memorandum to that effect entered on the college books"

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The whole affair at Sidney Sussex College had erupted following the award of a Bachelor of Arts degree; but there were always pressures on students at examination times, as Parkinson endeavoured to explain

"If sir you should happen to find yourself in front of the Senate House early in January you'll see a company of students to the number of thirty or forty gathering for their examinations. In the cold – and it can be bitter that time of year – they'll be well wrapped up with as many warm clothes as they can fit under their college gowns. This is a good time to be a glove-maker in Cambridge but I doubt there's many an undergraduate who has not been given several pairs for Christmas.

"They make their way to the cold and gloomy apartments we call the old schools, which lie beneath the public library. There on the tables are enough pens and paper as would fill the shelves of a village stationer and well-topped up inkwells – though some of the gentlemen swear they've had to break the ice before they could dip their quills.

"The Examiner waits in grim silence until the clock of St. Mary's strikes nine and then distributes a printed paper of mathematical questions. Utter silence descends for a while as the candidates study and start to pen their answers, but not for long. Soon there'll be a sigh or a sob and somebody will rise up from his seat and leave, often rubbing his hands pretending that the cold has got to them and he cannot write, or that his brain has frozen up. The remainder will scribble on until the clock tolls half-past eleven. Then the writing stops, the papers are folded up and given to the Examiner and the candidates slink or stalk out. There is then a break for an hour and a half before the scene is repeated. This continues for six days. It is not a time for jollification or enjoyment for the Mathematicians, but they are the elite of the University, they are the Honours men.

"At the same time there is a somewhat less arduous ordeal being carried on within the walls of the Senate House, where its even colder. These candidates for ordinary degrees, or those who 'go out in the Poll', study the more elementary parts of certain mathematical subjects, and one or two Classical authors, with part of the Greek Testament and a treatise on Moral Philosophy.

"Now perhaps you're wondering how they prevent cheating in these examinations? Is there no unfair assistance no whispering, no copying? Well in the examination for Honours the feeling of rivalry is enough to prevent anyone from assisting his neighbour, and to make him observant of every symptom of purloining or exchange - for this is a case where exchange is

robbery. In the Poll examination where most are happy just to pass, then the University do take more care in the shape of what are termed A and B papers. Two different sets of questions are drawn up on the subject of each day and so distributed that no two persons sitting together may have the same paper.

"Until recently there was another test – the disputation. Each student was assigned a topic on which he had to write a thesis then on the appointed day he would read it out in front of an audience. As soon as he'd finished three opponents would start to challenge him. That was enough of an ordeal but made worse by it all being in Latin, or something like Latin and continued until the Moderator decided the question had been sufficiently debated.

"In some cases it was magnificent theatre and stage-managed as such, with the performers getting together earlier to practice their questions and answers. With the time being limited a man whose talent consists in quick perception and ready-witted tact would benefit, especially if he'd been coached by his private tutors, who knew all the tricks. They'd have a system of coded signals – one told his student 'I'll sit in the gallery and when I button my coat you should say Nego minorem; but when I throw it open say Cedo majorem'. However many men with marvellous minds just did not have the confidence to debate in public without calm and quiet thought and they lost out. So now they have examination papers which are supposed to contain no more questions than students are able to answer within the time allowed. And when they've taken them they have ten days of agony, waiting for the results".

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"Now should you find yourself in front of the Senate House a little before sunrise on the first Friday after the 13th of January, you will see a somewhat different sight", continued Parkinson. "There'll be a cluster of gownsmen again, closely packed around the bolted doors and the railings which fortify the entrance. Others you'll see pacing backward and forward in the cold street. Most will be animated and cheerful, but some there are whose faces are more worried than excited.

"Presently you'll see one or two persons who by their dress and demeanour you'd recognise as dons, advancing up the street. The crowd gathers round them so rapidly and closely, that they have some difficulty in forcing their way. But finally they get to the doors of the Senate House, step in and the doors close again.

"You can feel the tension build up outside, people push forward even more. After a few minutes the doors are suddenly thrown open and there's a rush into the building. Then the noise starts: a single voice that holds on a regular and uninterrupted course and a confused mass of others. As you get nearer you catch distinct expressions – 'Where am I?' 'Where is Smith?" 'Huzza!' 'Read louder' and then you realise that someone is reading in a loud voice a list of names from a paper which is suspended on one of the columns near the entrance. Meanwhile numbers continue to flock in; and their faces show that to them this is a day of no ordinary importance, one to which they have often looked forward and which will always stay in their memories.

"But there are different lists of names. One is that of the Poll Men, those who have sat the ordinary degrees. Then there's a group of from six to twelve names with a blank space at each end: -this is what they call 'the gulf'. It is the names of those who have tried to obtain Mathematical Honours and failed, and yet not failed so badly, as to be considered unworthy of their degree. Those who have failed are not listed, they have been 'plucked', they must hope to try again. But most important of all is the result of the great Examination for Mathematical Honours. It is divided into three classes – Wranglers, Senior Optimes or Junior Optimes. The names are listed in order of merit and the man who tops the list, the Senior Wrangler, is assured of greatness for his fame will be known around the country.

“But within the last decade or so there is another achievement that is universally recognised. It is that of the man who tries for Mathematical Honours and almost fails. The one who scrapes through at the bottom of the list. When all the others proceed to the Senate House to receive the rewards for their study then he is there in his place. Like them he kneels before the Vice Chancellor seated on his dais who takes his hand and recites ‘Auctoritate mihi commissa, admitto te ad gradum Baccalaurei in Artibus’ as he has done to the all the others. But this man receives something more.

“For as he proceeds to his degree his friends in the gallery high overhead lower down on a cord a huge malting shovel, gaily painted and emblazoned with his college arms, till it dangles over his head like a sword of Damocles. And when he rises he takes this ‘wooden spoon’, shoulders it triumphantly and is cheered as he makes his way out of the Senate House and through the streets surrounded by his admiring friends for a day spent in merrymaking and sport.

“They have every right to celebrate for all will receive the further degree of Master of Arts without any further ordeal. But a man will have already undergone ordeals before this: he must have passed what is called the Previous Examination, better known as the ‘Little-go’ which takes place early in the second year. And then there are the annual college examinations which are held in May. It is a pleasing sight to see a College Hall crowded with students studying the questions before them, as sunlight streaming richly through the painted windows. Afterwards you’ll see them lounging on the banks of the river haranguing the bargees, or hastening into the open country for exercise. It is far better than attempting to write in the bleakness of midwinter and a fitting end of the academic year”

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According to Parkinson – though how a college gatekeeper should be so well versed in academic matters Pickwick did not think to enquire – there was no favouritism in Cambridge University examinations. The wealthy undergraduate had not advantage over his poor companion – apart of course from being less concerned about skimping and saving in his expenditure. For as a gentleman passed through his college and graduated from a small room to a larger one with more space to study it was obvious it would need to be decorated to his own taste. He would need new furniture and a way of life more in keeping with his status. Having a bigger room than some of his companions it was more suited to entertaining and every man he entertained might one day be of assistance in his future career.

Then there was the need to employ the very best private tutors. Somebody like Thomas Burcham of Trinity did not come cheap – but then he was in demand. He would take on only a certain number of pupils to go to his room for special cramming in that most important of subjects, Latin. He would teach them the techniques of translating past examination papers to get good practice for the real thing. He would encourage and cajole, instruct how best to prepare for which examinations or prizes, and of course put in a good word here and there. Such a service had to be paid for with bills of over 20 guineas a term not being unreasonable.

But a rich man did not actually get different questions and was awarded the same number of marks as his poorer companion. They could both proceed to the same degree, provided of course that they were both members of the Church of England.

There had been a lot of debate in recent years about whether to abolish this requirement, to allow in Roman Catholics or even Nonconformists. But the colleges were religious foundations & the University a traditional bulwark of the Established Church, it educated many of its clergy. Any man who proceeded to a degree had a vote in the Senate so it would

be wrong to allow a non-believer to influence the teaching of members of the Church of England.

The Catholic Emancipation Act had weakened the University's position and once the Government abolished the Tests and Corporation Acts excluding dissenters from municipal office it opened the door for them to demand equal admission to Oxford and Cambridge. They got support from several prominent academics who tried to get the University itself to abolish the religious entrance requirements but were defeated.

Others tried another tack saying that since there were too few doctors and only Oxford and Cambridge could award medical degrees then it made sense to encourage more by allowing those who passed to dispense with their declaration to the thirty-nine articles. Besides if they didn't do away with it then the College of Physicians would start to award degrees themselves, drawing men away from the older universities. But the Vice Chancellor would not hear of it.

So some of the other senior dons decided to go above his head and petition Parliament in their own behalf. But at Top Tables there were worries that once Parliament started to tinker with their ancient statues, rules and privileges then it would not know where to stop. Some of the heads of colleges talked about submitting their own petition in support of the present situation but in the end members of the Senate drafted their response, saying that any changes would make it impossible to provide sound religious instruction and maintain discipline. They also tried to get up a petition from the Senate to Parliament and called in people who were eligible to vote from all over the country.

Eventually when it got to Parliament it was proposed that all the King's subjects should have equal rights to admission to an English University and be eligible to take any degree, except those in divinity. This horrified the University; as Sir Robert Peel said it gave a positive right to every Dissenter, be he Jew, Infidel or of no religion at all to demand admission to a University, and once admitted then the College statutes requiring its students to attend chapel would be unenforceable. Despite this it passed the House of Commons but was rejected outright by the House of Lords. Well just how many in that august chamber had not themselves been a product of an Oxford or Cambridge education?

[WINSTANLEY Early Victorian Cambridge
GOODEN, A.C. Cambridge in the 1830s]

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Once the examinations are over it is time for the pent-up pressures to be released. And the best way of doing that was to go to the races. Gatekeeper Parkinson had once been employed by St John's college and still supported them in the tussle with their traditional rivals, Trinity

He always arranged to be free of his duties so he could attend the final boat race of the season. It was an event of such importance that even the traditional time of dining was changed to accommodate it, each college moving its main meal forward until two o'clock so everybody could be ready for a seven start.

Through the gates of each college stream scores of men in boating rig, pea-jackets and club-hats or caps all are making for the college boathouses from one of which flies a flag, proclaiming it to be the current champions of the river.

Every moment the path gets more and more crowded with

spectators heading for the ferry to take them across to the other side. At this time of the season there are three or four very dingy craft soliciting passengers, but they get few. Those in the know wait till the regular boatman comes back from his last load, with his clean blue boat, and his hat showing the ribbon of the head of the river. This is ‘Charon’ who soon punts over another heavy load, his boat on the verge of foundering.

Then all walk along the town path to the racing ground while down the river the club boats dart between the lines of coal-barges like flies in a cow pasture. It’s a good time to be about – especially for Tom the chimney sweep boy covered in soot with a broom even dirtier than himself who sweeps away the coal-dust and mud left by the colliers calling out ‘Give me a copper, sir, just one, sir. I'ye got no father, sir.’

Not all walk: cavalcades of horsemen and open carriages make the journey though Barnwell kicking up clouds of dust and attracting the attention of the roguish inhabitants of this most disreputable area of the town. They are heading for the Plough Inn, which is the middle of the course.

This is where the more refined crowd the bank: old oarsmen, tutors and proctors in their clerical garb, gather along with some very attractive young ladies who have made the journey to Cambridge just to be here for this the greatest night of the year. They are dressed in their finest gowns, little appreciating just how chilly it can be on a river bank in the evening. Not that they
are know or care what they are supposed to be looking at.

You’ll hear their beaux explain that as the Cam is scarcely ever over twenty yards wide it is too narrow to permit of rowing abreast and how it turns and winds a good deal calling for the most careful steering. How the boats draw up in a line, with a boat's length between each and the object is to row over the distance so as to touch the stern of the first with the bow of the second boat. If successful the first changes places with the second in the next race.

Then the racing boats begin to come up the river and row down to nearly the end of the course before they turn so as to bring each up against its proper post, with its head up the river. There it will be moored, and the crew step out to watch the other crews arrive in their various uniforms - grey and blue for Christ's, maroon for Corpus, the rich rose-colour of Emmanuel or the royal purple of Caius.

In one boat the oarsmen wear black hats, with a black and white ribbon round them; they are a wiry, vicious-looking lot - Trinity Hall champion of the smaller colleges. But still greater excitement is generated as a plain grey uniform comes into view, and all eyes tuen to watch the most noted club of the University. It is Third Trinity, composed exclusively of members of Trinity College, who have previously been at Eton or Westminster schools. Several of the oarsmen wear sky-blue caps to show he has been chosen to row against Oxford

Soon the line is nearly complete with just two to come - the dark blue of First Trinity and then the pigs: the St. John's oarsmen, in their scarlet uniform.

As fast as each boat turns, rows up to its post and stops it is surrounded by a crowd of admirers from its own college, and sarcastic outsiders who exchange remarks of all kinds with each other on the event, and countless bets are made. Gradually the crowds melt together, and the whole bank becomes alive with a thousand University men of every type of face, mind, and particularly costume. But the gladiators themselves, the crews, begin to feel cold, and start on a stroll.
All is expectation, waiting for something to happen.

[SCAN OF BOATHOUSE WITH FLAG FLYING]

Parkinson explained his enthusiasm for the bumping races – he had been in from the start: "There's still an argument as to whether it was a Trinity or a St John's man who had the idea first, or whether they both had it at the same time. One lad had been to school at Westminster and seen the Thames with its mass of boats of all types, the other had been to Eton and become captivated by the technique of rowing. So they challenged each other, and their college, to a race.
"Our lads from St John's got hold of an old Eton boat, very strong and very high and named it 'Lady Margaret'. The Trinity crew had their boat specially built in London and was by far better suited to the Cam. Well the Johns men started off first with their steerer blowing on a bugle to let the Trinity men know where they were. Then the race was on, Trinity started after them and with their lighter boat soon caught up and bumped them. That's how it started and soon other colleges joined in with their own boats and about ten years ago a University Boat Club was set up. Now some of the larger colleges have two, three or even four crews and you'll see as many as 25 start in the same race.

"Once they're all in place there's a bang of a gun calling the crews back to their boats. This is a worrying time for the coxs seeking out their men – some of who will be late exchanging a last challenge to the crew of a rival boat. Then the jackets are torn off and thrown to the men on shore. Bang! the second gun and its 'Push out' and slowly, steadily, the oars are raised, and the boat gently fended off. 'Quarter of a minute gone' and all down the bank you'll hear from every boat - 'Quarter gone'. Everybody settles in their seats, the last jackets are pitched ashore, they take a firm grasp of the oar, never to be let go. 'Half a minute gone' and now the boats are all in the middle of the stream. 'Fifteen seconds left'. 'Ten, nine, eight, seven, six, five, four, three, two, one, - gun, 'Bang!'- splash and they're off.

"Two hundred oars hit the water that swirls and eddies and then the screaming begins: 'Well started, well started'. 'Well rowed, well rowed'. The boats dash forward – and so does the crowd.

"All along the bank comes of hundreds of men at the gallop, trying to keep up with their particular boat. You see them in every sort of dress or undress, tearing along at the rate of a mile in three minutes; stumbling and falling, shouting and pushing, their eyes starting, on fire with excitement.

"It is a dangerous time to be a spectator. I've seen a fat little tutor knocked down, and his pupils rush over him, all but trampling him to death. But they will never stop for anything like that. Those watching further down the course will be shouting and cheering for their boat, only to be aware of this mass of undergraduates charging down on him. There's nowhere to go to let them past so they have to run and try to keep in front of them, coat-tails billowing out behind, hat blown off. But its to no avail, they'll be overtaken by the masses and that's the last you'll see of them.

"But then one boat will catch another and its supporters will stop to congratulate them, glad to have an excuse to stop running, and the charge diminishes a little.

"Out in the river they'll have reached Ditton corner where there's no water for the bow oars within ten feet of the bank. Here the steerer needs steady nerves, with number two and four oars having to pull even harder to coax the boat round and not give their chasing rivals any advantage for you can gain or lose several feet here. It brings the boats to within a few feet of the crowd who are at their thickest screaming encouragement to their crews.

“Last year my boat, St John’s were in front with Trinity chasing and they had a shorter boat, more easy to turn. Six more strokes and the Trinity were overlapping them but the steerer jerked the strings too suddenly and did not make a hit. We got a few inches ahead again and the crowd roared harder. That sparked the Trinity to think they were nearer and they had another spurt. I saw the bow inch nearer and nearer but then drop back only to surge again. Just when it seemed they must be caught at the next stroke the Pigs reached the finishing post – they were still head of the river.”

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The triumph of the St John’s crew in bumping races of 1838 had been tempered by tragedy when one of the floating bridges had floundered under with weight of 30 or 40 over-enthusiastic spectators, three of whom had nearly drowned before being pulled to the side. It had resulted in the cancellation of one of the races, but had prompted an adventure, as Parkinson explained

“Everybody’s exhilarated at the end of the races and there’s always a scrum back to the boat houses. But it seemed something of an anticlimax, just to pack up and go back to college. So the lads decided that, as they’d missed one race, they’d just continue a little further down.

“The Conservators of the Cam had been busy building new locks to try and keep enough water in the river so that the barges could float. The whole course they used to row over had to be moved as a result and this had caused great annoyance. The clubs had protested – the bumping races might only have been going since 1827 but had become a traditional part of University life. The Conservators took no notice; they took out the lock at Chesterton replacing it with a new one at Baitsbite and the moved the other one from the Fort St George down to Jesus Green.

“Several times the lads had talked about taking the boats along the Backs, but with the lock at the Fort there were always too many people about to risk it. Now the coast was clear so three or four of the eights just rowed on. That caused some consternation with the ferrymen, especially Bates who crosses from Midsummer Common to the new Chesterton Road and was worried that the oars would get entangled on his chain.

“Then they approached Niagra – the new weir on Jesus Green - and someone said they should try shooting the rapids. But to do that they had to get through the lock. The keeper lives in a house alongside the river but he wasn’t in – still making his way back from the races – so one of the lads opened the gates, the rest gave a final spurt with their oars and the boats drifted in. It took a few minutes to work out how to operate the lock but they managed it and then they were out the other side. How far could they get before anybody in the colleges noticed them – they decided to find out.

“As they approached Magdalene Bridge the river was almost blocked with barges. The bargees care nothing for college bumping races – they’ve got the muscle just to barge through and disrupt everything – so the college lads encourage them to stay put till they’ve done by sneaking out several barrels of the Trinity audit ale. That’s the strong beer brewed specially for the college in their own brewhouse beside the river and it is really potent stuff. After three or four pints of that nobody is in a fit state to move anywhere! But of course the bargees know the score and they all make sure they’re at the Quayside rather than anywhere else on the Cam for the night of the races. It took time and a little bit of manoeuvring but the rowers managed so squeeze through and under the bridge, past the coal yards.”

This was an area Pickwick recalled well, having made the journey on Will Spread’s barge just a day or two previously. “The lads of the Lady Margaret were particularly worried as their craft crept ghostly-quiet under St John’s college kitchen bridge. Each man was anticipating

the reaction of the college fellows whose carousing could be heard clearly – celebrating the achievements of the men now risking their college careers in this clandestine stunt.

“The bend towards Trinity caused some concern as the oarsmen had difficulty getting in their strokes in the narrowness of the stream. Then they were past the two most dangerous spots on the voyage and everybody breathed a sigh of relief as they powered under the new Gerard’s Hostel iron bridge and on towards Clare, lining up to shoot the centre span.

“Now the vista on either side opened up, King’s college chapel and the Gibbs Building some way to their left while on the right the startled eyes of cows watched their passage. Now there was no need for secrecy for King’s did not even have an eight and Queens’ had not bothered to enter a crew that year, having been soundly beaten in previous races. And anyway it was time to start raising their voices, building themselves up for the greatest challenge to their right to row the river – the Mill Pool”.

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Parkinson had been unable to establish quite what did happen after four of the rowing eights had burst from the peace of the Cam into the maelstrom of the Mill Pool. None of the men involved had as yet broken their silence – perhaps when they returned he would be able to wheedle the details, and anyway something of that significance could not be kept quiet forever. Certainly it had escaped the eagle eyes of the representatives of the Cambridge Chronicle and Cambridge Independent Press who were anyway too busy berating each other in their incessant political battles.

But from what he could gather from snatches of conversation overheard in Cambridge taverns it had been a most interesting evening indeed. The Mill Pool had been packed with barges, though most of their crews were down at Magdalene Bridge, and the rowers were able to moor alongside them without being seen.

Then they had started to wreak revenge for the numerous times their sport had been disrupted by the bully-boy tactics of the coalmen ploughing their way down the river and scattering rowers on all sides. In a parody of the Boston tea party they had emptied bags of white flour straight into the blackness of the holds which had just unloaded coal – this being considered preferable to dumping the coal itself into the Cam since Cambridge rooms were too cold to be denied heat.

Next they had started to sabotage the barges themselves, removing the long spreads with which the bargees steered their lines of lighters and half-cutting through the stout ropes which were used to connect with the horses on the towpath. This and other mischief had been accomplished without detection.

But then they chanced their luck too far. It being a dry warm night Alice Bond and the rest of the laundry ladies had left their washing out on the lines across Coe Fen and it was there that the students made their way. Surely the sheets would dry better if suspended from the masts of the barges– and this in turn would provoke the animosity between those who used the waters of the Cam for their washing and those who churned that water into liquid mud. All had gone well until one of the raiders had slipped in a cow-pat and his curses had disturbed the sleep of James Nutter who had taken to spending the night in the King’s mill so he could keep an eye on the activities of his untrustworthy band of workmen.

Nutter had raised the alarm by blowing the horn used to warn the other millers that he was about to start to grind. This had raised the laundry ladies who were quick to spot that their washing were being raided and their appearance in their night-clothes had scared the cows on Coe Fen which had stampeded. Soon all was chaos.

The students had scrambled into their boats as quickly and tried to get back to the safety of the boathouses. But they had difficulty turning their craft in the crowded Mill Pool finding themselves wedged under the wooden piers of Silver Street bridge. By the time they had got straight both bridge and surrounding wharves were packed with townsmen shouting, jeering and pelting them. Lumps of coal, bars of washing soap, stones from Mrs Shuker's box mangle rained down - the latter thrown with gusto by Alice Bond - while her daughter took the opportunity of disposing of some of the empty bottles of Schweppes lemonade she had concealed from her mother.

Even after they had escaped the Mill Pool the danger was not passed; the rowers still had to navigate under the arches of college bridges which were themselves now being thronged with porters, students and dons. And to make matters worse Nutter had opened the sluice gates and a tidal wave of water swept down the Cam carrying the boats before it. One eight was wrecked on the arches of Clare college bridge, another sunk by underwater debris left by the workmen who had been constructing the new cast iron Gerards Hostel bridge and only two approached Magdalene Bridge. Here even the bargemen who had consumed several pints of audit ale had now been roused and were manoeuvring their craft to form a blockade across the river; one boat impaled itself the other scraped through the narrowing gap though its oars were ripped from the rowers' hands.

That final stricken craft found itself washed down towards Niagara, the newly-constructed weir at Jesus Lock. Could they shoot the rapids and emerge safe beyond?

420

It had been the St John's college Lady Margaret boat that had survived that hellish trip along the Cam but was now being swept out of control towards the waterfalls on Jesus Green.

Its cox, Baldock struggled to steer the boat towards the bank while the oarsmen – Shadwell, Julius, Antrobus, Rolleston and the rest - were mere spectators, left clutching the stumps of what had once been oars. There was some hope that they might be able to catch hold of the chain strung across the river to prevent boats being swept to destruction but it was not to be. There was nothing anybody could do but await the inevitable disaster.

Almost in slow motion the rowing eight, pride of the college, head of the river, disappeared over the precipice and plummeted into the churning waters below. Seven half-drowned men made it to the bank – Wawn, Metcalfe, Fletcher amongst them – but of the eighth there was no sign.

Parkinson had tried everything he knew to discover the identity of the last rower but nobody was saying anything. It seemed the lad had disgraced himself in the eyes of his fellow oarsmen. It had been his blunder into the cow muck that had let to the raid's failure and he had last been seen fleeing across Coe fen pursued by an irritated cow. It was not something a pig did and his name would be deleted from college records.

The pride of Cambridge rowing boats were scattered along the Cam, each wrecked beyond repair. Corpus, Christs, Caius and Trinity's Queen Bess were like Lady Margaret just a heap of splintered wood. Chastened groups of students scoured the banks of the Cam searching for debris. They collected up the remains of their craft and carried them in state back to their colleges where they were stacked in a pile for all to mourn.

The blades of the shattered oars were sawn off and the names of each rower inscribed upon them in the traditional way. For traditions must be maintained and the arrangements for the bumps suppers had already been put in place. That year they were grander than ever before.

At Trinity 47 bottles of Champagne, 12 bottles of Sherry, six Moselle, two Claret, six quarts of ale to say nothing of punch were consumed by just 38 people before proceedings became so riotous that the Junior Proctor intervened to break up the party. But at St John's proceedings had been somewhat muted, everybody's thoughts dominated by the pile of wood that had been only hours before the head of the river.

It could not just be allowed to be split into kindling to light college fires; something far more fitting should be organised. Great events, famous victories or indeed any excuse was enough for a bonfire. Usually these took place on Market Hill where the market stalls supplied fuel enough but this was a peculiarly college event. So in due solemnity the men left their supper and gathered around the remains of their craft. There in the centre of the court they constructed a funeral pyre while the rest of the college – dons, porters, proctors – looked on. Dinner menus, mathematical notes, Latin and Greek translations provided the paper, a candle from each room was added to the pile and the whole ignited in due solemnity.

All the college stood in silence as the boat smouldered and then burst into flame casting shadows around the ancient walls. As it died down so the memory of that night's events, the shame of university manhood being routed by washerwomen and uncouth rivermen was confined to the darkness. It was something to be expunged from memory, it would not be spoken of – even to former college servants like Parkinson.

But it should not be forgotten completely. Next year they would organise a proper procession of rowing eights along the Backs to the Mill Pool, this time garlanded with flowers that could be quietly dropped into the stream to ensure the events of May 1838 were commemorated without anybody knowing why it was being done.

421

Saying farewell to the Sidney Sussex College gatekeeper Pickwick crossed the road to a narrow street which he hesitated to explore. The windows of the houses on either side seeming to be staring at him, whilst two gaunt buildings towered above the rest, their very brickwork seeming to crumble before his eyes.

"Have no fears, friend, for this is a friendly place": the voice came from behind him. "Mind you I have known a time when even I would not dare to enter; until twenty years ago this end was virtually cut off, with only a narrow lane for entrance. Some say that during one of the plagues the street was so badly affected that the authorities boarded it up at either end. When they finally pulled the boards down there was grass growing up the middle of the road as high as a man's chest and so they called it Green Street. Had it not been for Stittle it would still be unknown to most of the folks of Cambridge."

This was a name that rang a bell with Pickwick – had not Nutter the miller mentioned the Reverend Stittle who could match Simeon with his preaching, even though he could neither read nor write. His new acquaintance was amazed – had he been one of those undergraduates who had so tormented the Minister by letting sparrows loose inside the chapel. Or was he perchance a relation – after all the Reverend must have many relations, seeing as he had been married four times and outlived his last by so long that had he known he'd have married another! If so he in the right place – although Stittle had died back in 1813 his body still lay under the pew that contained the Communion table.

Pickwick explained that he was none of these, just a visitor with an interest in discovering some of the quirkier sides of Cambridge life that he could share with his companions. In that case Green Street was surely worth a little exploration. Stittle's chapel dated back to 1688 and had been entered from that narrow passageway. Further along on the right, past the Volunteer,

was the former home of Alderman James Gifford, a fine Georgian building of red brick standing back in dignity behind its lofty gates. But at its entrance stood the poorhouse of St Michael's, now redundant with the creation of the Union. It had been one of the smallest parish workhouses in Cambridge which with 68 inhabited houses hadn't suffered some of the problems of the others. Its inmates were well-known members of the community unlike at Great St Mary's where they made them wear badges with the initials S.M.G on their sleeves to show which parish they were from.

"Our University town is a city of churches: as we had 14 parish workhouses they were small buildings with only a dozen to a score of inmates in each. By 1826 the workhouse of Great St Mary's housed besides the governor and his wife just 15 indoor paupers - five men, five women and five children. It was in Slaughter House Lane near that of St Edward's who hired a building from the Botanic Gardens with vines clinging to its walls. But others were not so savoury; I was overseer at All Saints and we were always having to fork out for rat poison and louse powder for our building in Sidney Street. In recent years the number of inmates has increased and with it the poor rate; in addition our building became ruinous and we were faced with the problem of whether to rebuild or wait and see if the New Poor Law would change things. Its as well we did as now our poor house is being used for able-bodied men and women with infants while the Mill Road Union is being erected.

"These institutions were Workhouses rather than merely Poorhouses and so we tried to furnish employment for the adults and even for the young folk. We had a rope-walk in Jesus Lane up till 1807 after which John Walker took the paupers off our hands and put them to work – he also hired some of our rooms to put them in. The Overseers of Great St Mary's bought rods for basket-making, but most of the men worked in the Barnwell gravel pits if they were robust and industrious enough for hard work. Some of them were feeble and broken down, most of them lazy and disorderly and often they were drunkards - not to be wondered at, when the consumption of small beer in the poorhouse exceeded all discretion and had to be cut down to one quart a day for each pauper"

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Pickwick's new companion was obviously a caring man, well aware of the problems of his poorer neighbours in the lane that was Green Street.

"We have our madmen and half-witted creatures who cause special problems; some like Polly Sudbury just roam about the streets, but others like poor Isaac Smith in St Edward's parish have to be confined in a room in the workhouse yard. In Holy Trinity parish they have one poor lunatic who has to be shut up in an outhouse without shoes or stockings and the overseers are worried that his legs and feet will mortify. We try to do our best but sometimes when they really get too bad we have to remove them to Bethlehem, though this is an extra expense we can ill afford.

"As for what we call 'unfortunates', well when a young woman gets pregnant and is likely to become chargeable to the parish we have to interrogate her to try and get her to reveal the name of the father. But this is always difficult for on her word alone an accused man can be arrested and imprisoned until he's paid what is down often a large sum of money and there've been several cases when I'm sure the woman has named the wrong man out of spite.

"When there is uncertainty as to the person responsible, I must admit we do all we can to get rid of the problem by marrying her off'. The Overseers at St Clement's parish paid for a wedding present to Widow Arnold, by which they got rid of her in the family way. But with so few people in any parish many families have been touched with the shame of illegitimacy

and many of the bastardy books have been quietly disposed of now the new Union has been introduced."

But for the most part Green Street was a well-behaved mixed community, as Pickwick discovered as he was guided house by house: "John Whitaker is a college porter, James Smith a cabinet maker … That's the home of Thomas Wilderspin, he's a baker with a wife and four children to support; Elizabeth Sell is a shopkeeper. We have painters and tailors, milliners and shoemakers, carpenters and pawnbrokers, bakers and bonnet makers, there's Southee the surgeon and Gallyon the gun maker, together with various college or other servants and several bookbinders, like me."

Here John Bowtell introduced himself. "I used to have premises here in Green Street but moved to All Saint's Passage where my son still continues the business. I help out when I can, though less now as a binder and more as a customer. I am one of the Keepers at the University Library; they have numerous books that need to be rebound and if a man cannot recommend a good tradesman to do the job well what would the world come to?

"I started at the Library twenty years ago as an extra assistant to John Marshall, an old man who was then in failing health and got his job when he died in 1819. The library's open from 10 to 2 each day and I'm supposed to be on duty during those hours – but there's hardly anyone use it and they never notice if I'm not there. There's about 100,000 books spread over four rooms but the finest of them is the catalogue room. It's the oldest room in the University and was originally used as the University chapel and Senate House until they opened that new one in 1730. It has a marvellous plaster ceiling dating back to the 1600s and some of the most ancient glass you'll ever see – though the view through it is distorted. Now they've just laid the foundation stone for a new building but it will never have the character of the present one.

"The University decided they ought to get a catalogue made and gave the job to Professor Farish of Magdalene who was very absent-minded. He soon settled into the job, almost living in the Library and often forgetting to go to dinner. You knew when he was there from a ripe aroma coming from his room. One night the college porter saw him walking across the court very furtively so he followed him. The Professor was carrying a large white bundle which he threw into the river. When the porter fished it out he found it contained all his dirty linen which had become too foul to be endured any longer! After a while the Librarian asked to see what he'd done, which was very little because every time he came across a book he'd not seen before he'd sit down and read it. So they gave the job to me. I spent nine years working on that – 20 guineas a letter they paid. Then I did the same thing for the books at King's College when they wanted them moved them from the side chapels to the library in the new Wilkin's building. You might say I have a better knowledge than most of antiquarian books, though nothing to compare to my uncle John".

[Sources – PCAS vol.11; FOWLER, 1841 census]

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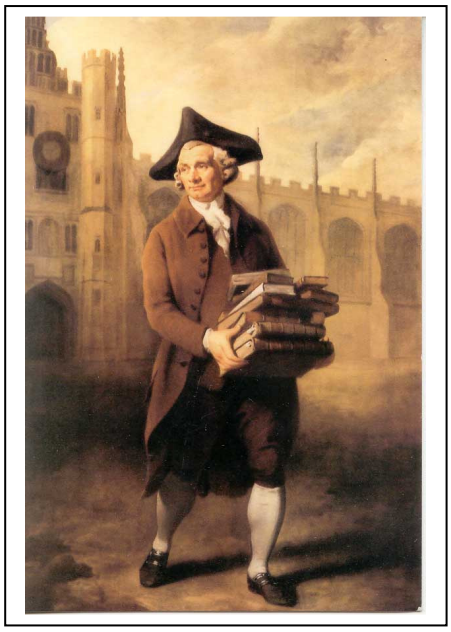
Although obviously well-acquainted with poverty, John Bowtell was himself obviously well-off. He acknowledged that this was due to his late uncle, in whose footsteps he was following, a man who made a fortune and spent it to ensure that his name would be remembered in the history of Cambridge, a subject with which he will always be associated.



"Uncle – also John Bowtell - started his apprenticeship as with the man universally known as 'Maps' who used to live in an old-fashioned, but large and commodious house belonging to King's College now pulled down to make way for the new screen. He had a very large stock of books required at college lectures, both classical and mathematical; but he did not sell them – he rented then out to undergraduates for a termly subscription. He worked hard for his business and was out the most part of the day loaded with books, going from room to room in the different colleges, and announcing himself by shouting 'MAPS' as he proceeded. Those who needed material on particular subjects would apply to him and, if they had no objection to paying a high price, they got just what they needed. He'd even supply manuscript sermons to parsons with better things to do that write them themselves. Between him and Jemmy Gordon undergraduates with money hardly needed to work at all.

"Then uncle set up in business on his own account as a bookbinder; he knew his trade and he was good at it so that he was soon the principal binder to the University Library. He was particularly friendly with John Marshall, the Library Keeper – the man I started off working with (that was uncle's doing again, in fact he left him £200 in his will). He branched out into stationery and bookselling, but he also offered to transcribe any manuscript needed by don or undergraduate.

He read everything he could get his hands on about Cambridge. He went through all the church documents in the town and made some tremendous discoveries. When going through the chest at Great St Mary's came across a bundle of papers marked 'useless'; he opened it up and it was the contract for the erection of the Rood Loft in 1520. Then he found one of the oldest of the St Giles parish registers in some rubbish in the corner of the clerk's house, covered in mortar. That was how Cambridge looked after its archives!

Then he started to discover other things. In 1788 he was talking to the minister of St Michael's church when he heard about a pile of old papers in the church chest. They were nothing to do with the parish and were going to be sold off to a shopkeeper as waste paper. Uncle bought them, took them home and started sifting through them. It turned out they were volumes of papers relating to Corporation property which had been found in the home of Alderman York, Town Clerk, when he died back in 1756. His brother had put them in the chest for safe keeping, but then he'd died and nobody knew anything about them. The next Town Clerk, James Day, knew uncle was interested in such things so he gave him some more corporation papers from the 1600s together with some notes written by a Mayor in 1615 and something even older – piles of old memoranda books compiled by Thomas Metcalf back in 1592. And when James Day died his brother passed on more piles of council documents. But uncle was prepared to pay too – he bought the manuscript diary of Alderman Samuel Newton off his widow and other things from the auction sale at the Cambridge Chronicle in 1782.

He decided that he'd compile a history of Cambridge and wrote volume after volume; he wanted to publish them but balked at the amount he was being quoted by the printers – he was good at making money, but not so keen on spending it.
Then as he got older he got worried about what was to happen to it all; he knew that neither the Corporation or the University had any great interest in things antiquarian and didn't want to have his collection scattered. He was friendly with Wilkins the architect who was designing the new Downing College and decided to offer the lot to them to establish a Bowtell Collection where historians could go when they wanted to research. But he was only partly

successful for in the last few years I've come across various papers in uncle's handwriting that somehow disappeared from his files. He'd turn in his grave if he knew!

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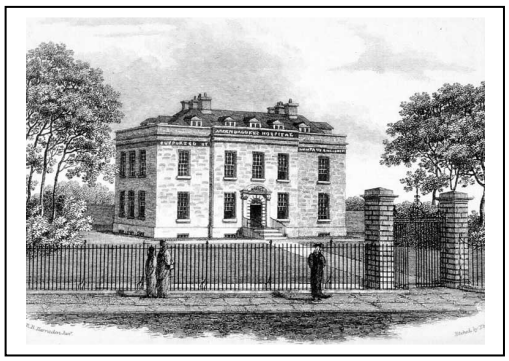
If John Bowtell had experienced troubles finding somewhere to leave his books, he had been more concerned about what to do with his money – and being a bookbinder he had made plenty of that. But even so he did not get what he wanted

At his death in 1813 he had been generous to a number of causes dear to his heart. His largest bequest was to Addenbrooke's Hospital to whom he left half of his estate, approximately £7,000. But he specified that this was to be applied in enlarging the hospital so as to provide medical care for people who were not actually sick – especially for poor married women during their confinement. He was quite definite that this was what the money should go to, otherwise it was to be given to St Michael's church.

The Hospital Committee however had other plans; they needed a room for operations to be performed in, more accommodation for patients, a place where the physicians could examine patients and a room for religious worship. Provision for pregnant women was low on their list of priorities. So they applied for the Court of Chancery to allow them to use Bowtell's money in this way instead. After long consideration the court disagreed.

This threw the Hospital authorities into confusion, but they did not want to lose the money. So once more they debated and a year later – and some eight years after Bowtell had passed away – they came up with another plan. They would use the money for surgical cases, as distinct from medical ones, they would build a ward for people applying for vaccination, another for people suffering from personal deformity, a ward for those with contagious skin complaints and one more for convalescents. And if the Court rejected all these, why they would build a lunatic asylum a little away from the main hospital. Surely this would meet the terms of the will!



Two years later the judgement came down – they could use the money for most of the cases, but not the skin diseases. However the convalescent ward should be for people who would otherwise have to be discharged from hospital even though they would not be able to look after themselves.

Now that the way was cleared the hospital wasted little time in recommending the erection of a two-storey wing on each side of the main hospital to give four more wards. Charles Humfrey – a name now well-known to Pickwick – was commissioned to draw up plans which were to include a colonnade in front of the old building. Work was soon under way but the Committee was continually changing their minds as to the new layout, increasing the number of water closets from two to six and adding a laboratory. But the new building work also revealed structural defects in the roof of the old hospital buildings which had to be remedied, lowering the roof line and removing various chimneys.

By the time they had finished the whole appearance of the hospital had changed almost beyond recognition and thanks

to John Bowtell's legacy it was all covered with plenty of money left over,. But the surviving members of the family felt the Hospital had been less than appreciative. The least they could have done would be to name a ward after him but there was no sign of that! Though at least when one of the executors bequeathed them a portrait of their great benefactor they had agreed to pay for the framing!

Pickwick was left to speculate just how a poor bookbinder had accumulated such wealth, especially as this was only a part of the money he left

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If John Bowtell's executors had experienced problems ensuring the fortune he had left to Addenbrooke's Hospital was spent as he wanted it was to prove no less problematic in disposing of some of the rest of his money, as his nephew explained.

"Uncle left another £500-worth of stock to the Trustees of Thomas Hobson's Workhouse, the Spinning House, stipulating that the interest should be spent on placing young Cambridge boys as apprentices so they could learn to gain a comfortable living. That was back in 1813 and we thought things had gone through, but then a couple of years ago it turned out that the funds had not been used in the way he wanted. Other money had also been misappropriated and the whole thing was a mess.

"When it went to Court the lawyers and historians had to pore over all the old documents, such as there are – and it is ironic that without John Bowtell even more of them would have been lost. They found the original aims of Hobson's charity had been neglected and the building that should have provided a place where people could be employed on spinning and other useful work was being used as a receptacle for abandoned and profligate woman. Instead spending it on apprentices the Trustees had sold uncle's investments and used the money on building new cells and employing a warder and surgeon. The solicitor for the Charity asked that the money bequeathed by Bowtell should be repaid by whoever had authorised its misuse, and go to St Michael's church instead.

"Everybody involved tried to squirm out of the responsibility: the Mayor said the deed of foundation made it house of correction so the council were only visitors and not involved in the management of the charity – that was down to the Trustees.

"There were only three surviving Trustees left and they said the management had been entrusted to the Mayor & the Vice Chancellor of the University, but if that was wrong then they had acted in ignorance of founders' intentions and only followed the course adopted by their predecessors. It was unfortunate that uncle's money had been mixed up with other funds and used to repair the building, but as the estate had had the benefit then they ought not have to reimburse the £500 out of their own pockets. But when you consider who the Trustees are - Joseph Procter and Sir John and Frederick Cheetham Mortlock – you'll realise that they'll get away with it – the "Cheat'ems" always do.

"Last year the court judged that the purposes for which the premises are used ought not to be continued and that the salaries to the treasurer and surgeon should cease. The Charity Trustees should review their accounts and get a new scheme for its future management, together with different trustees.

"The council, the University and the Trustees are still talking about what should happen next. The University wants to keep their bit of the building for imprisoning prostitutes, the town want a bit for a police station. Some want the whole of the Spinning House to be pulled down and a small hospital built in its place to benefit five decayed tradesmen and five women.

Others think the building should just be repaired and the rest of the money spent on apprentices. It will be years before they finally get around to actually doing anything."

"At least some of his other bequests have been applied correctly; there was £1,000 towards the repair of Holy Trinity church which has gone towards the rebuilding of the chancel and £500 to St Michael's. It was here that he wished to be buried, in the vault within the altar rails which already contained the body of his wife and my young daughter Ann. You know, I believe he must have had some inkling of the future for he willed that the stone covering his grave should be inscribed with details of his various benefactions so that none of them should be forgotten!

"Since his death there have been so many changes to the church that he would have difficulty recognising it as the place in which he worshipped and once more there has been great controversy about them – well were did the money come from this time?

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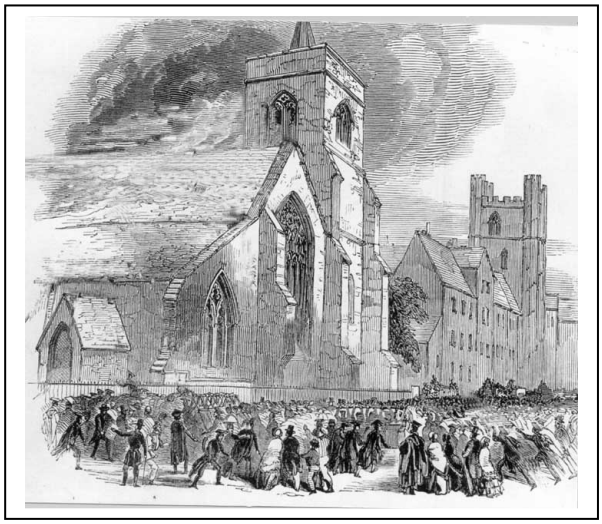
Pickwick had heard much of the early history of St Michael's Church from Roe the printseller but an old church needed a lot of maintenance and that was expensive. A few years earlier the minister James Scholefield, the Regius Professor of Greek, had been the subject of intense criticism leading to what Bowtell would only describe as 'disgraceful scenes' at a vestry meeting.

It had been alleged that he had spent such large sums in improving and renovating the building that the church rates were exceedingly high, double or treble that of the other parishes. He should realise that this was a large church in a small parish with few ratepayers to share the burden, not everyone was as rich a don like he was.

None could deny there had been tremendous changes even since John Bowtell had died in 1813. The old lead-covered spire had been taken down and the roof slated back in 1818 but since Scholefield had been appointed perpetual curate in 1823 the builders never seemed to be out of the place.

For a start he'd just made external repairs and cleaned the interior but then he'd started rearranging the furniture. He moved the beautiful and light ancient screen that had separated nave and chancel to another position, since he felt it was an obstruction - but not one farthing of the expense was defrayed by the parish rate.

Then in 1828 he'd erected a large gallery entirely at his own expense - except for part of the organ gallery which had been paid for by the builder. There'd been a new organ but money for that had been raised by voluntary subscription with the majority coming from the Bishop of Ely and Caius College.



He'd replaced the old new pulpit – but the money had come from the parishioners & not one sixpence was paid by the parish. Then in 1832 he'd spent more than £10 of his own money on two handsome oak doors art the south-east entrance church to promote the comfort of the congregation, and there'd been a new stove – but that had been charged to the rates.

It was the rearrangement of the pews that was particularly contentions, but nearly the whole of expense of that had been defrayed by Prof Scholefield himself and the remainder had been paid by the people to whom the pews belonged. He'd also contributed an extra 12 pews at his own expense which were offered to any of the parishioners who might choose to occupy them at one-half of their original cost. Mind you, added Bowtell, the free seats near the Communion Table had been designed for children rather than grown-ups and you could spot those who had occupied them by the way they hobbled out at the end of the service.

But the seats were needed to accommodate the scores of people who flocked to hear Scholefield preach; the church was often full to overflowing with people packed six to a pew designed for five. And with more people had come more income through the collecting plate. The proceeds had been divided with one fifth going to the parish, some more to increase the salaries of the organist and clerk, while he'd kept only two-fifths himself to compensate for the extra services he'd introduced, with two evening services on Sunday and Wednesday. All this in a parish from which the minister received less than £100 a year – it seemed good value to Bowtell's mind.

[SCAN OF CROWDS FLOCKING TO SERVICE AT ST MICHAEL'S CHURCH – 90.47a]

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Whatever changes had been undertaken at St Michael's church at least its future seemed secure; John Bowtell junior was less certain about the prospects for the other church in Trinity Street, All Saints. He had been one of the churchwardens who had made a decision in 1820 that could sound the death-knell for the church.

There had not really been much option: "There has been a continuing pressure to widen the streets so as to cater for the increasing amount of traffic. The Commissioners for Paving have been working their way through the town and decided something had to be done about Trinity Street. No one can deny the roadway is very narrow especially between the old wall of Trinity College garden and our church tower. The solution was obviously to move one of them back – but which one.

"The college said they had moved the wall a little in 1786 so now it was up to us. We had to sacrifice four feet of our churchyard. I can tell you that some people were prepared to fight over that piece of land – there was a precedent for it had already had to be purified once after blood had been shed there. Mind you that was back in 1352!

"But it was that other work that really caused the controversy. Have you ever known the indignity of having to knock a hole right through an ancient church tower so that people don't have to step out into the street!

"It is the oldest part of one of the oldest churches in Cambridge. Uncle's researches show a church was certainly there by 1278 while the existing tower dates back to the 15th century and one of the bells carries the date 1406. It's certainly much older than the nave that is about 100 or more years later.

"Some say the church used to be thatched but now the nave has a glorious double hammer-beam timber roof which dates back to the 16th century and as this continues over the aisles they were obviously built at the same time. The windows are more modern and the organ is one we were given by Jesus College about 40 years ago. We've also got several old books – and as you can guess these at least are well looked after, with good bindings.

“We have few memorials, which is a bit surprising seeing that it used to be the burial place for members of St John’s and Jesus colleges. This is due in part to William Dowsing and his iconoclasts during the Civil War who knocked down eight cherubims but more to a major rebuild back in 1726. By then the church was in a particularly ruinous condition. That restoration was largely funded by Jesus College as apparently the parish used to be united with that of St Rhadegund before the King’s Ditch was dug.

“Mind you if uncle John had been around in those days he could probably have found some more ancient documents and encouraged the College to fork out a bit more. He didn’t mind too much about altering history to serve his own ends. In fact while sorting through some of the old church registers he decided to look into the family history. He discovered that the family name was originally spelt ‘Bowdle’ but he didn’t think that was very distinguished-sounding, so he took the opportunity to change it. It just goes to show you can’t believe everything you read!

“So there you have it; a piece of inconvenient patchwork, changed and defaced by successive restorations and improvements which is to us the heart of our parish. But now people can be heard to mutter that the bells jangle and disturb the services in the chapel at Trinity college across the road, that the building looks ugly and of course that it makes the street too narrow for all the number of stagecoaches that clatter past it. We’ve lost our part of the churchyard, we’ve now knocked a hole in the tower – I suspect they’ll not be content until they’ve knocked the entire building down. I only hope I’m not there to see it!”

[sources : CAS Bowtell, Romilly, Cooper J.W. Clark Annals of All Saints church. Ecclesiologist Apr 1860]
[scan 71.52]

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“At least things in the diocese of Ely could only get better”, lamented John Bowtell. “For now there was a new Bishop of Ely and he could not be as corrupt as the previous one, Bishop Sparke.”

Pickwick had already heard mention of this prelate: it had been him who’d presided over the trial of the Littleport rioters – ‘waddling like some fat duck’ – was how Henry Martin had described him; while Leonard Jenyns, who preferred to call himself Blomefield, had told how Sparke had presented him to the living at Swaffham Bulbeck ‘he gave me the appointment without any interview and I never saw him until years afterward.’.

Bishop Sparke was quite used to presenting people to the various livings under his control: well what was the point of being Bishop if you could not help you own sons?

“Take John Henry Sparke, his eldest. The lad was educated at Eton and Pembroke college, Cambridge and as soon as he’d got his BA in 1815 he was immediately appointed to a Bishop’s fellowship at Jesus College and in made steward of all his father’s manorial courts. Then in 1818 on taking his MA degree his dad made him a prebendary of Ely cathedral. He only occupied that chair for a few years before he swapped it for another which had become vacant on the death of the Littleport hanging judge, Sir Henry Bate Dudley. Why swap seats – because the house and garden that went with the new position were considered the best in Ely. He was also appointed Chancellor of the Diocese of Ely and got himself married to an heiress.

“That wasn’t the end of it, by a long means. In 1818 his father had also appointed him to the sinecure rectory of Littlebury and a month later he got the living of Stretham as well. Next year the Archbishop of Canterbury changed the rules to allow John to add the living of

Cottenham to his portfolio. For a while he was settled and enjoying a nice income for little work, but then in 1827 he gave them all up to move to Leverington. That really was the pick of the crop – worth about £2,000 a year and he seems to be settled – mind you he's since got Bexwell too! Incidentally, you being a literary man might know that Oliver Goldsmith wrote his play 'She Stoops to Conquer' there while sitting under a mulberry tree in a house near Crackskull Common and he got the name for his main character from a slab to Captain Anthony Lumpkin in the church

"But that's not the end of the Bishop's string-pulling for there was his younger son too, Edward. You could say he followed the same course – Bishop's fellowship at St John's college as soon as he got his degree – though he had to move his friend Charles Jenyns to free it up. Then he was made Register of the diocese and soon got his Prebendary stall at the Cathedral (which of course he exchanged for a better one within a couple of years). He had his share of livings too: Bexwell to start with, quickly followed by Barley and Hogeworthingham which he swapped for Littleport and Connington – to be followed by Feltwell within the year. Add it all up and it comes to about £4,000 a year, nearly as much as his brother gets from all his appointments.

"It was as well Bishop Sparke only had two sons, but he had a son-in-law as well, the Rev Henry Fardell. His career also took off – deacon, M.A. degree, another prebendary stall (there can't have been many which weren't held by the Bishop's family) and the livings of Tydd St Giles and Waterbeach. Then things got really complicated. Fardell resigned Tydd in favour of Bexwell which that week was held by one of the Bishop's nephews Mr Daubeny. He got shunted to Feltwell but when they stopped to work it out they found that Feltwell was worth more than Bexwell and so Daubney had to swap it back again. He was so very annoyed at being mucked about so the Bishop gave him Tydd as well!

"I do wonder whether any of them know whose minister they're supposed to be from week to week and what chance the poor souls who should rely on them for ministry have got of salvation!

The only good thing you can say about our late Bishop is that thanks to him journeys into the fens at night were less dangerous than previously, for at almost every village there was a little Sparke!"

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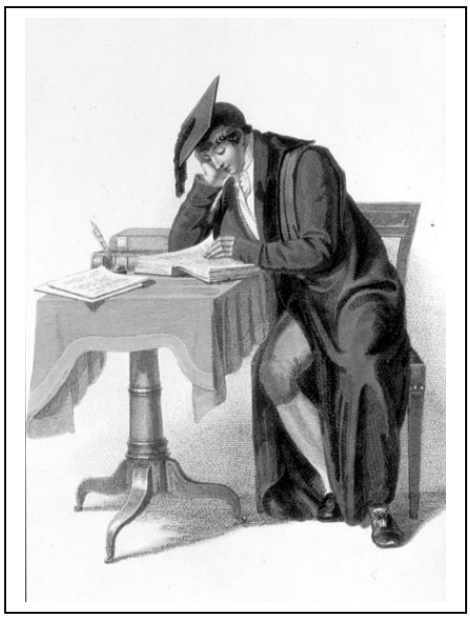
Bowtell broke off his attack on the church as he spotted an old acquaintance, Elliott Macro Smith, a man who knew more of the insides of Cambridge colleges than probably anyone else.

Elliott was one of a dynasty of Smiths who had made their money through their special skills; not for him the craft of the bookbinder, Elliott was a cabinetmaker. He had gone into business with his step-brother, John, back in 1803 and taken over on his retirement four years later, then when John died in 1817 Elliott had succeeded to the lease of their premises beside the Great Gate of Trinity College.

It had been a good time to be a furniture maker, colleges were prospering and had money to spend. Elliott soon expanded, leasing two additional tenements for his stocks of timber and increasing the size of his saw-pit. From here he had only a few steps to his best customer, Trinity College. He supplied them with tables crossbanded in tulipwood, side tables, upholstered chairs on walnut cabriole legs, chairs for the dining room – the work poured in. He papered and curtained the Lodge and then he built the great bed.



When the Duke of Gloucester became Chancellor of the University in 1811 he had stayed at Trinity. This had been the college he'd entered as an undergraduate when as a 'Nobleman' he'd had the privilege of dining in hall with the Fellows wearing a most conspicuous gown and paying four times as much for all regular college expenses as ordinary mortals. But at least he'd a regular seat in the dining hall, that lofty room with the open lantern on the top that allowed pigeons to fly in and compete with the sparrows that fed off the crumbs on the table. He'd not had to compete to sit by the great wrought-iron dish filled with glowing charcoal that gave out little heat but made the dining hall so smoky that it almost disguised the strong smell of bread and meat that put men off their food. And when the winter had set in, the river froze and the barges could not get through with supplies of coal he'd not had to burn his furniture to gain a little warmth. But others had – and the replacements had added to the furniture-maker's income.

Now the Duke was being welcomes back in style and the College had commissioned Elliott Smith to refurnish the bedroom in the Master's Lodge with a four-poster state bedstead complete with bed steps, curtains, blankets and quilt, stools and carpet. It was a project that was to cost them over £400. With this and other college furniture no wonder that within a dozen years Elliott too had made his money and retired from the cabinet and upholstery side of the business when aged 50.

So in August 1832 he held a two-day sale of some of his stock; people flocked to the large room of the Hoop Hotel for the chance to secure mahogany wardrobes and chests of drawers, dining tables, glazed book cases, card and dressing tables at reduced prices. There were leather double scroll sofas, music desks, four-poster bedsteads, goose-feather beds and masses more, not to mention carpets, chintz window curtains and table cloths. There was still enough left over to stock another two-day sale that November which included a set of Spanish mahogany telescope dining tables, loo, Pembroke and card tables. Cellarets and wine coolers, Trafalgar chairs with slip hair seating, japanned bookcases and a Turkish carpet all found eager buyers.

His retirement in 1832 opened the way for the other cabinet-makers; some of his own employees set up on their own account including, James Hunt in Market Hill, John Worseldine in Rose Crescent and Robert Hills in Bridge Street while John Swan took over supplying furnishings to St John's college. Samuel Yorke who had premises in King's Parade expanded the paper-hanging side of his business, taking on one of Elliott's best hands to ensure his claim to quality.

But Elliott had not finished making money altogether, he kept on another almost equally profitable side of the business – that of auctioneer and appraiser, taking his son into the business.

[Source: R. Williams A Cambridge family of furniture makers. 1976]

Elliott Macro Smith was one of those men who was as well known to undergraduate as townsman or country squire – and he had added to that fame with his ambitions as town councillor, being only narrowly defeated for the position of Mayor of Cambridge the year previously

His humour was well-known with many an undergraduate being told: "if you are in search of amusement go to his auction rooms where you may find a good article and low price; you cannot fail of finding genuine wit above all". But by no means all undergraduates came away from a meeting with Smith quite as happy as he had gone into it, as Bowtell confided.

An undergraduate has many expenses, and many perks. As he progresses through his college so he has the opportunity to trade up to rooms of a better quality but these choices present difficult decisions. Bowtell had heard one such outlining his predicament to a friend:

"I have been offered the choice of three sets of rooms and the best are those formerly kept by Lord Napier in the Great Court. They are airy and quiet but require new-papering and re-furnishing and it is the expense of these operations that stops my choice. The truth is that the rooms are superior to the common run and if the expense of furnishing does not appear too great will be permanently more comfortable. To settle in any of the other rooms would cost about £50 or £60 and to fix myself in these nearly £100. I have spoken with my tutor, Thomas Thorp and he seems to think there is no problem with the credit – father has always paid the other bills.

"The second set is also very good but need repair, papering and painting and this is something I've experienced before. I returned from vacation before to find the doors and windows standing wide open to try and expedite the departure of the paint smell, there was no fire, no light, no blinds or curtains. It took weeks to restore any semblance of warmth. The third set is in a most disagreeable staircase where there are a good many noisy dissipated men – mother would never approve

"I really have no choice – I must have the best, if only I can persuade my father. If I can make do with the existing wall-hangings for a term or two then I may be able to take them on. The rooms are almost unfurnished; Thorp says that the difference between buying new furniture and taking the old at valuation is not great and that he knows a good supplier. But I have arranged for the furnisher to come in and give his opinion."

"I hope", his friend had replied, "it is not that scoundrel, the great Elliott. I had him visit some rooms I was intended to take in order to appraise them. For a start he never arrived when he said he would and I spent a good hour waiting about. Then it was days before he came back with a bill for furniture, amounting to £40. 'What!' cried I, in amazement, '£40 for furniture? Mr. Peacock said he put me in rooms to oblige me, and does he oblige me to pay £40 for this miserable furniture?' 'Oh! customary, customary, Sir', replied the great Elliot, 'Gentlemen always pay for their furniture'.

'And do they pay for their rooms too?' said I. 'Oh! to be sure, Sir: you will pay £25 per annum for these rooms. Very pleasant rooms indeed: extremely airy. A very nice gentleman kept in these rooms last, Sir'. 'But pray, Mr. Smith,' I asked him, 'were rooms in College always so high?' 'Oh! no; they were much lower a few years since, till they came to build the new court.'. So terminated my colloquy with Mr Elliot Smith; and that's why I find myself in the most unhealthy rooms in all Cambridge; cold, damp and disagreeable; and when I might have had the best lodging in town. . ."

“You should do as we did last term”, the first chap advised him. “Make sure you arrive early and take the opportunity to explore those rooms that are still unoccupied around you. It is amazing what easy chairs, shelves or even books you can discover, and if you slip the porter a shilling or two why they will be happy to turn a blind eye, or for a florin more even help you move them!”

[scan 50.16; source Williams ‘A Cambridge family of funiture makers’ Smith Cambridge in the 1830s’]

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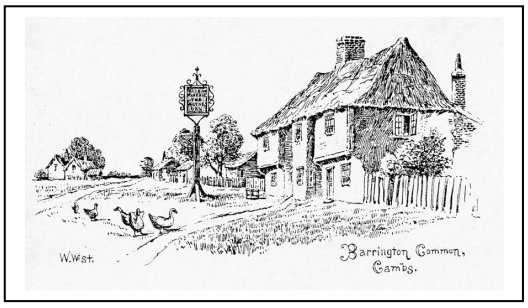
To an ordinary man the life of an auctioneer was one of constant variety; not for him the daily drudgery of unchanging and unceasing toil; his profession allowed him to travel and see the area. But, as Elliott Smith, made clear after a while even this became just routine.

“We have so many sales in so many places that I often need to consult my diary just to know where I am – or where I was last week”. And consulting that volume he detailed some of his activities for the last month or so. July 18th we had a sale at the Boot, Histon – Mr Barker’s house on The Green together with a couple of acres of land on the road to Impington. Histon is a pleasant enough place and there’s always the tale of Elizabeth Woodcock getting lost in the snow to drag into the banter before the serious business gets under way.
“The next week it was Waterbeach when we were at the Rose and Crown with instructions to sell five cottages lived in by Simpkins, Baxter, Downes and the rest and bringing in rent of nearly £19 15s. a year. There was also a plumber and glazier’s shop that you could soon convert into another cottage. Now I know that the Rev Cole did not like the village at all: moaning that his house was so damp and smoky that the was driven out of the parlour and upstairs, before finally ‘not being a water rat’ he’d moved to the higher ground at Milton! However the real problem has been John Denson ranting on about poverty and how people are in a state of wretchedness and getting the place a bad name. But fortunately there’s been quite a few outbreaks of fire in the last few years and it’s surprising how once the number of cottages is reduced just how much demand that does give for those that are half-decent.

“Then we had John Tuck’s house at Foxton – there was quite at crowd at the Black Boy for that sale even though we’d had to change the date. Not a bad place, with orchard and an acre of land in a pleasant village just off the turnpike road. We also had a couple of public houses, one on the edge of Sawston with a tap room, excellent cellar and four most pleasant upstairs rooms. There was a house next door with some good stables – were it not for that tyrant Thomas Evans the place might be worth visiting.
But I prefer Barrington and at the end of July we had the sale of the old Royal Oak beer-shop with its two parlours, kitchen, large cellar and a newly-erected brick and clunch brewhouse and brewing-plant. Barrington is a go-ahead village: they’ve just opened a new school-house in the cottage gothic style. I was invited to attend and went across with scores of others; we all processed into the Park where there were tables garlanded with flowers and filled with tea and cake. After the children had polished these off – not too hard to do when you’ve got 70 of the little blighters – then there was time to wander about, chat to the locals, and emphasise the value of dealing with an established firm such as ours. Once the children had gone, and the church bells stopped pealing then many of us went to Barrington Hall where John Bendyshe provided a very good meal before it was off to church for the evening service.
The church has been in a bad way in Barrington for some time; services have been few and far between and the old vicar, Rev Thomas Finch who died last year, only appeared in the village to carry out the most urgent business. The lack of services caused problems because once the overseers of the poor have fixed a parish rate it



can only be granted after its been read out at a church service. A couple of years ago the Squire refused to pay saying this had not been done and the parish had to take him to court to get their money.

They've had more than their share of problems over the years, but thank god nothing to match those of John Pamphilon. When his wife was in labour the poor man had an attack of the megrims – he went out of his head. So the officials sent for a blacksmith who provided irons to hold the man down – it was four months before they got around to calling in a doctor. After a while he got better, continuing his trade as woolcomber, before his health broke down again and he was confined to the stocks with men paid to watch over him. He improved then declined time after time until after 25 years he finally died. I feel pity for him, but more pity for those poor churchwardens, struggling to cope with something they could not understand for year after year, spending money they could ill-afford to look after one of their parishioners. No wonder they looked to places like the Royal Oak to ease their own problems! [Sources – John Pamphilon, Steven An attack of the megrims, Barrington Chronicle, Ch sales]

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Elliott Smith the auctioneer continued to recount some of his experiences in the course of his business during July and August 1838. House sales were not the extent of his concerns; the firm had dealt with horses, rams, tups and hay as well.

The horses had been on Richard Norman's farm at Stretham where on 1st August they'd disposed of four mares, two foals and a good Norfolk cob. They'd also been some good carts – a mixture of broad and narrow wheeled tumbrels with copses and ladders, light and heavy market carts and four ploughs. Richard was giving up farming to take on the White Horse public house.

There'd been quite a change in the village pubs: Francis Langford had retired from the Red Lion but he'd been there 70 years and it was about time he called it a day. Business was profitable what with all the stagecoaches that now called there, and it was as well to sell before the new Marquis of Granby pub got itself established and took away trade. Smith's firm had of course handled the sale.

Stretham villagers were also coming to grips with a new Rector – in a way of speaking at least. For the Reverend Henry Hervey Baber had been appointed to the job back in 1827, he just hadn't been there very much. Now that had changed since he'd given up his London job as Keeper of Printed Books in the British Library. He'd spent the last 25 years building up the collection but fallen out with the Trustees over a new scheme of cataloguing and resigned after they'd brought in a new ruling that Museum Officials should not hold any other paid post.

Already he'd been making alterations to the rectory, adding a wing here, a chimneystack there and a garden veranda. But he'd also sold off the parish poor house which had given shelter to eleven parishioners and put the money towards the costs of the new Union workhouse at Ely.

Next day had seen Elliott at Trumpington disposing of Mr Ladds' celebrated herd of 40 shearling Leicester Rams whilst a few days later there'd been another 70 fine shearing Leicester tups on Richard Daintree's farm at Hemingford Abbots followed by 31 head of milch cows, a couple of mares and a very useful donkey at Willingham.

Smith explained: " Sheep have generally been bred in the cultivated parts of Huntingdonshire but are mostly of the Lincolnshire sort, and not the best of their kind. A few cows are kept for the dairy, the produce of which is generally reared but these likewise are but ordinary, being a

sort of mixture between the worst of the short-horned and long-horned kinds. Mares are used for all purposes of agriculture and every farmer breeds as many as he can from them, selling the colts off at two years old and as many fillies as can be spared. You never see oxen, as they cannot walk upon the surface of the fens without being bogged down.

"A Huntingdonshire fen farmyard is usually quite large with a wall around it made of cole-seed straw about six, eight or ten feet broad at the bottom, and they carry the straw wall up six or eight feet high, tapering narrower till it comes to the top. This makes a very warm fence and will endure many years with now and then a little fresh cole-seed, straw or stubble laid on the top. And as there is plenty of such straw in the fens it is very little value for any other purpose. Such farmyards are usually divided into two or three partitions, so that the farmer can put his horses in one part, his young stock in another, and his hogs in that part that is next to the barn doors"

Like all farmers they are subject to the vagaries of the weather and whilst those in the fens usually complained of being flooded the last couple of years had been terrible because of prolonged drought. "All common horse ponds have been long dried up, well after well and spring after spring has followed until water has become a scarce commodity. Then we had twindstorms last month which has brought red-gum – damaged blossom which is preyed upon by flies who lay their eggs in it. We've also had a lot of black jack. One farmer had a fine crop of turnips that got so smothered with these caterpillars that he almost decided to plough them in. But as he couldn't get any replacement crop he decided instead to hoe round them. The day after the hoers had finished hundreds of rooks descended on the crop and within a day or two there was no caterpillar to be seen. Yet still farmers will still shoot the rooks!"

[Sources – Marshall Agriculture – Huntingdon, Ch 4 Aug 1838, Turbulent Priests]

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Despite his county wanderings it was Cambridge itself that supplied the majority of Elliott Smith's business as an auctioneer. In recent weeks he had sold a newly-erected house on the banks of the Cam at Chesterton. Its noble drawing room pleasantly lit by a neat cupola and its modern conveniences including a supply of water from the latest hydraulic pump had ensured a ready sale, despite its location near the river with the constant passage of bargees such as Will Spread.

Then there had been the house and warehouse rented out to Shallow and Coleman in Sidney Street and the house opposite the new Baptist chapel in St Andrew's Street occupied by the Rev Thomas. Hughes. He was curate of the All Saints – though, said Bowtell, if he continued to preach excruciatingly bad sermons that might well be a position he would soon vacate. But why Hughes would need a seven-bedroomed house with butler's pantry and two servants' bedrooms was beyond him.

From time to time Elliott would have something out of the ordinary to brighten a dull day – like the sale of a stone wall. Mind you it had been a very beautiful stone wall forming the north end of the east front of the University Library and including four beautiful arches. There were also nine fine stone balls, but they were a separate lot. Quite how Elliott Smith came to selling them Pickwick chose not to inquire, especially seeing the glance that passed between Smith and John Bowtell, one of the Library-keepers.

But the oddest sale must be that of a Chapel of Ease on Mill Road. It was just the usual sort of building materials – brickwork, lead gutters, flashing, floorboards and so on, together with the less usual pews, pulpit, communion railings, bell and belfry – oh and a fine-toned finger-organ. But that was not the end of it, there were still the beams and rafters, bolts and screws which would also find a ready sale later in the year. The materials were as fresh as the day the

chapel had first been erected back in August 1826 to serve the new burial ground for the expanding district of Barnwell. Now it was coming down to make way for a new Christ Church. Within a few years nobody would remember that it had ever been there. But that was the way of the modern world and there was so much change going on in the burial line.

Here Smith demonstrated an interested in the macabre, not those souls buried in consecrated ground, but those destined to lie largely unrecorded at country crossroads as a posthumous punishment. Now that practice had been ceased in 1823 it too would soon be forgotten with only the occasional roadside stone remind the seasoned traveller.

Smith recalled Nan Saxby's grave where the road from Linton to Balsham crossed the Wool Street & the gypsy boy's grave where the parishes of Chippenham and Kennett joined that of Moulton. At least the story of that lad was known – he had been a shepherd responsible for tending sheep who had dosed off. When he awoke he had counted his flock and found one missing but seek as he might he could not find the strayed animal. Afraid of being blamed for its theft he had hanged himself. When his body was discovered it was surrounded by the whole complement of his flock; tragically the lad had miscounted.

Often rural crossroads were chosen as the execution and burial place for criminals. People believed the cross of the road would disperse evil energy from the corpse. It had the benefits that that passing traffic would pressed down the soil to prevent the deceased's ghost from rising and if it did manage to arise then the various roads would stop it from finding its way back home. The spot would also be a reminder to other travellers not to indulge in such wicked acts. They would see the grave and be deterred from following the example of the person interred there

But it was not just the murderers who found themselves buried in such lonely places. For if murder of one's neighbour was a crime then murder of oneself was worse. People had started to become squeamish and call it 'suicide' but to Smith it would always be 'felo-de-se'. Not for them the consecrated grave, not for them burial in the community where they had lived, and not for them the knowledge that what little savings they had amassed would pass to their heirs. Their goods would be forfeited to the state & they would be buried at midnight with a stake driven through their heart.

Barnwell chapel – extra – very plain and somewhat spacious brick edifice erected in 1826 by Dr Geldart, improprietor of the parish of St Andrew the Less but which not yet consecrated by the Bishop though Divine service is performed on Sundays and Holidays. Adjoining is a burying ground – Cooper New Guide 1831

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Elliott Smith's interest in roadside burials had been stimulated by his own observations as he travelled throughout Cambridgeshire as part of his auctioneering duties. But then he had met a man who'd been able to impart something of the background to these lonely graves. Pickwick, Bowtell and Smith adjourned to a shady corner of All Saints churchyard, away from the bustle of Trinity Street where they chose the most comfortable-looking gravestone to hear the details

"It was a few year ago that I first met Hugh Evans, an Ely lawyer who acted as coroner for the Isle of Ely and Witchford Hundreds. It was his job, when there was a sudden or unexpected death, to convene an inquest as near to the site as possible. Like me he needed a suitable place and, like me, he found the village pub was ideal. The landlord was always happy because all the villagers would come along to watch and boost his takings.

"Now Hugh Evans reckoned he must have convened over 250 inquests and the most usual cause of death was drownings, the second 'visitation of God' - which was anything nobody could really explain like when a chap was found dead in his bed. Burning and scalding were other regular causes then road accidents - people are always falling off carts, usually when drunk, or riding their horses too recklessly and ploughing into walkers. He'd had a couple of murders, several manslaughters and all sorts of odds and ends like being crushed by a beer barrel; suffocating after swallowing a penny; and being struck by an anchor.

"His main problem was the fele-de-se or self-murderers, what they now call 'suicide'. He had to hold the Inquests on the day, or the day after, the discovery of the corpse. Witnesses who knew the dead chap and the people who first found the body would give testimony. Then it was up to the jury to come to a verdict after which it was down to Evans to pronounce the cause of death, and make directions for burial if appropriate

"One of his first cases had been of an E1y porter who hanged himself in June 1799. His cousin testified that a week earlier he asked for the return of a rope he had lent her, and Robert Bristow, a fellow porter said how they'd discussed a case of suicide at Barnwell with him. Well that was obviously *felo-de-se* so Evans directed that he be buried at Barton Pits, on the road between Ely and Stretham. His friends raised a subscription for a stone over the grave, with an inscription on three sides saying: *'All ye that pass by, pray to God to preserve and keep you from the clime of Self Murder on which occasion this stone was erected'.* I do remember seeing it some years ago, but its gone now.

"Then in August 1807 Richard Butcher, a Litt1eport labourer told how he'd met his old friend Jacob in the Woolpack public house at Ely. Jacob had been away for several years and as they walked back to Littleport he complained of his unhappy domestic life, saying how he disliked his wife and would become a sailor. Next morning he was found hanging from a chestnut tree. It took the jury meeting in the Marquis of Granby five hours before they decided it was *felo-de-se.* This time Evans directed that the parish constable and churchwardens bury Jacob below Portway Hill at Littleport

"He had a couple of cases at Little Downham, one held in the Anchor, the other in the Windmill. There was a chap who took an overdose of laudanum in May 1816 - that was the time there was all that disturbance at Littleport. The other was a woman who hanged herself; her friend tried to show she'd been unhappy and unsettled for several years, and hoped that she might still be buried in the churchyard. But she was buried in the highway instead. However he said some juries tried to exercise discretion in returning verdicts. When Gotobed Goody of Witchford hanged himself in August 1805 his wife had testified that he had been in sound mind, but the jurors returned a lunacy verdict to save her distress - and prevent the State seizing his goods"

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As Elliott Smith explained, convincing the coroner's jury that a person who had killed themselves had been a lunatic was one way to avoid the worst of the financial penalties.

"Coroner Hugh Evans told me he'd had various cases including a twelve-year old Stretham lad who hanged himself; two witnesses had described him as a 'boy of weak intellect, not like other boys' and so he was judged mentally unbalanced because of his youth. Another man who'd hanged himself at Wentworth had been in 'melancholy and uneasy in mind' for six months and when an Ely tailor

drowned himself in a well his wife and two other people testified that he frequently showed signs of depression, especially after drinking".

There'd been at least one witness to attest to depression or mental disturbance when a Manea couple hanged themselves, when a Littleport woman poisoned herself, an Ely man died of drowning and a Little Downham chap hanged himself. Then when another Manea man had cut his throat several people had observed that violent efforts had been made to restrain him, leaving little doubt as to his mental condition. At least they could lie in their village. For the others it was the roadside.

Smith told the story of one wayside grave he'd seen in a cottage garden at Peterborough. It was that of a young woman named Elizabeth, who'd took arsenic after the man she loved deserted her. Almost immediately she'd changed her mind and sought medical assistance, but it was too late and she died after twelve hours agony. The jury decided that although she may have suffered insanity at the time she took the poison the fact that she'd regretted the action was proof of her sanity. Elizabeth was buried near the Spalding Road, attended by six female relatives dressed in white, before many onlookers. But at least she'd been spared the stake driven through her already-broken heart

Driving a stake through a suicide's corpse during burial would prevent the ghost from rising but sometimes had another consequence. There was a tree on the crossroads of the Great North Road between Buckden and Brampton that had grown from the stake driven through the body of a murderer who had been hanged there – people call it 'The Cruel Tree'

But it is not done any more. Now those who took their lives are buried in cemeteries between nine o'clock at night and midnight, but without any ceremony. Sometimes in the evening after conducting an auction Smith had caught a glimpse of the gravedigger making his way to work in the gathering gloom to prepare for the lonely interment.

Of course there were much larger and older graves if you knew where to look. Out at Bartlow, near Linton, there had been several large mounds until the local farmer had flattened most of them just six years ago to release more land for agriculture. Rumours soon spread about finds of glass urns, human ashes, a gold ring and various beakers dating back to the Roman times. And in each one there was also a large iron-bound locked wooden chest.

This was surely buried treasure and the work was stopped until a group of academics, clergy – and an auctioneer – had gathered. They watched while the ancient boxes were opened to reveal a glass vessel filled with the cremated ashes of a single body together with flower petals, incense that still smelt of frankincense or myrrh and bottles containing wine mixed with honey, and blood and milk. But the oddest thing of all had been an folding iron chair with a seat of leather straps. All have been taken to Lord Maynard's house, Eastwood Lodge, where Pickwick would be allowed it inspect them if he wished.

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Elliott Smith had to travel the Cambridgeshire highways and byways in the course of his work as estate agent and auctioneer; such roads could be lonely and frightening places. The danger

of highway robbery was always present and the names of the villains who terrorised travellers were always being recalled in wayside inns.

One such was that of Jeremiah Lagden of Little Abington, a notorious highwayman. He was the son of Emma Lagden, landlady of the White Hart Inn at Bourne Bridge. Emma herself was quite a character; although brought up as a Quaker she had built a reputation as a temptress, laying herself out to attract men calling at her establishment. Scandal and intrigue surrounded the comings and goings at the busy inn which was known to be a notorious rendezvous for smugglers on the London to Newmarket Road. The place had been raided by Customs and Excise when tea and lace valued at over £1,000 was seized. After Emma's death, Jeremiah's brother Robert took over the business but closed the inn while his family were suffering from small pox.

It was here that Jeremiah started his career of crime. Having been made the post boy he made himself rich with monies stolen from the post. Later he obtained the position of steward to Lord Montfort of Horseheath. For a while things went well but then one day his Lordship was walking in his park when he tripped over a rope stretched on the ground. On making further investigations it was discovered that Jeremiah was using the rope to drag masonry from Lord Montfort's mansion in readiness for removal to Abington where he was building a house of his own!

That was one property Smith would welcome the opportunity to explore for tales abounded of hidden cupboards and how Jeremiah had secreted rolls of silk in the well. Some of that may have come from Jeremiah's niece who worked in the French Court and took the opportunity to smuggle precious silks and perfumes to Bourne Bridge!

There was little doubt that Jeremiah was involved directly with robberies on the local highways but nothing was ever proved; he lived to the age of 97 years, died in his bed and was buried in a vault at Abington – but in unconsecrated ground.

But the most exciting period in the village's history had been many centuries earlier. John Bowtell's uncle had been browsing through ancient documents and pieced together an extraordinary tale from the year 1266 when King Henry III was at war with his barons. Little Abington men supported the King, but the Earl of Oxford who owned property in Great Abington was one of the chief rebels. One day the Earl's Bailiff was holding a Feudal Court, settling disputes and fining evil doers. Among them was Henry, son of Walter, but when he came for judgement, one of the witnesses made a secret sign to the bailiff, to say 'this man is one of us, he has been in arms against the King our enemy' so the bailiff let him go unpunished.

But royalist supports cut down many oaks and ashes in Abington Park and stole the Earl's tithe corn while Thomas Tuddenham of Little Abington seized the land of any of the Earl's supporters in that village. This was too much and the Earl ordered his men to burn down Tuddenham's farm house in retaliation.

Matters came to a head after one of the Earl's tenants in Hildersham died and his bailiff sent men to take charge of the land. But the royalist Parson and the Lady Isabel Pancefot, of Hildersham Hall.had them roughly thrown out. Then in a spirit of reconciliation she invited the Earl's bailiff to come and talk matters over with her. As soon as she got him into her Hall, she set her servants to beat him, which they did so severely that he died in three months.

Such treachery could not go unrevenged. His brother Gilbert bided his time but then gathered a troop of armed horsemen and burst in to Hildersham Hall, calling for Isabel in the most foul language and threatening to beat her, as she had beaten his brother. When they could not find her they thrashed all her servants, broke into the buttery, drank all the wine and beer they

could, and left the taps on to waste the rest. Then they drove off all her oxen, horses and sheep. Once she emerged from her secret hiding-place Lady Isabel brought an action for damages against the Earl, but before it could be decided she was dead. They say she died of fright.

[Source – W.M. Palmer. Neighbourhood of Hildersham and Abington. 1924 – pam 229]

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Though he found the thirteenth-century interesting, auctioneer Elliott Smith really preferred his history to be of much earlier periods. He enjoyed actually being there when lost-lost artefacts were brought to the light of day for the first time in thousands of years.

There was one such site he had witnessed, out at Litlington near Royston. It was alongside the part of the Ickneild Way called the Ashwell Street Road, an ancient way crossing the country from Norwich towards Old Sarum, the old street of the Iceni.

The village lies a furlong north of the line of the road and various Roman foundations had frequently been discovered whenever the ground was disturbed for new building. But there was one spot that nobody wanted to go near. It was known to generations of local lads as 'Heaven's Walls' and none dare pass near it in night-time because it was frequented by beings of a supernatural order.

But back in 1821 some labourers were digging for gravel in the area and struck upon the foundations of one of the old walls, though all vestiges of them had disappeared from the surface of the soil. Fearing for their souls for disturbing the sanctity of Heaven they fled.

The news of their discovery was soon talked off throughout the county and reached the ears of the Rev Dr Webb, Master of Clare Hall. He was quickly on the scene – together with Smith – and took charge of matters. He rounded up the men who had made the discovery and set them to work to explore more thoroughly what they had found.

By following the line of the walls the men revealed a rectangular space measuring thirty-eight yards by twenty-seven. Then they were set to work intersecting the area with trenches. They did not have to dig very deep, for just twelve inches below the soil they discovered an urn containing what Webb identified as the ashes of an ancient human body. The excitement of their find was intensified when they found another, and another and another.

Soon it was getting predictable, row after row of urns. Then they found actual bodies that had obviously been buried later, for the urns in those places had been roughly pushed aside to make room for them.

But that was not all, there were also other vessels buried alongside the urns; some were amber-coloured glass, some green; some were plain, some decorated. Most had pointed bottoms obviously intended to be pushed into the soil to keep them upright. And in many cases they had fulfilled that aim for they still contained aromatic ointment apparently made from balm from trees and shrubs which, Webb said, had been compounded with the tears of the mourners to provide a gift for the ancestors the deceased was about to meet.

Then there were the coins found in the mouths of the skeletons, placed there to pay the fare to the ferryman who was to take them into the next world. There were dozens of them. The experts dated them to the reigns of Hadrian, Antonius Pius and Constantine the Great showing that the site had been used throughout a long period of Roman rule.

There had been other discoveries too. In two corners of the inclosure were found large heaps of wood ashes, enough to load five carts. There were undoubtedly the remains of the funeral pyres and had lain there undisturbed for centuries.

But the thing that had really brought the site home to Smith had been a little bottle. It was really nothing special, just a bottle that had once been used for household duties. But now it contained the ashes of a small child – except that the mouth of the bottle had been too narrow to take some of the fragments of burnt bone. So an ancient hand had carefully chipped off a corner, carefully inserted the remains and then replaced the broken piece to close the aperture. There it still lay until the workmen had rediscovered it. That was real history in Elliott Smith's eyes.
[SCAN OF THE RECTANGULAR SITE AT ICKLETON]
[A.J. KEMPE. Account of the collection of Sepulchral vessels]

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But it did not pay to muck about with ancient burials as Smith explained.

At Chronicle-hills, between the villages of Whittlesford and Thriplow, there used to be three tumuli or barrows of remote origin. They'd been there for hundreds of years, but things change. With the demand for more land for agriculture it was decided about 20 years ago that they should be cleared. It was obvious that something would be found because of the quantities of broken pottery, pavement and other remains that were always coming to the surface.

Smith had made it his business to be present and related what happened

"Ebeneezer Hollick employed some labourers to level these three barrows on Got Moor. They stood in a line nearly north to south on the north side of a brook separating the two parishes, where the old road to Cambridge crosses it.

"Before they started Hollick measured them; the middle barrow was eight feet high and 80 feet in diameter, but the others were much lower. They ranged along an ancient flint and pebble wall, which was about four rods long and 30 inches thick. Beyond this was an ancient well, made of clunch, nine feet in diameter. It was full of flints and curiously shaped tiles formed to lap over each other. Some of them had a hole in the centre and Hollick thought they'd been used in an aqueduct. We sent a man down it to see what was at the bottom of the well and he came back with a couple of very large elk's horns

"Then we started on the tumuli. In the middle one we found four human skeletons lying on their backs, about two feet from the bottom, with broken pieces of terra cotta that looked like Roman. When we opened the northern one we found a large quantity of bones of a small quadruped. There were so many that the workmen took out whole shovels full but none of us could identify quite what animal they had come from.

The jaw was similar to that fossilised beaver they found in the bogs near Chatteris and the teeth were the same but much smaller. One of the University Professors came out and had a look and thought they might have been lemmings – like the ones in the mountains of Lapland. He sent specimens to Sir Joseph Banks and Sir Everard Home in London and they thought they could have come from a shrew mouse. A couple of years earlier the Commissioners of Forests had written to Sir Joseph asking what could be done to get rid of them because they were damaging young plantations. We think perhaps thousands of years ago a colony of these animals was hemmed in by some flood and all of them drowned, huddled together at this spot.

Unless of course they'd thrown themselves of the tops of the tumuli is some mass suicide pact!

"A little north of these barrows were two other sepulchres constructed of flints and pebbles put together with fine gravel. They were each surrounded each by a circular wall two-and-a-half feet thick, three feet high, and 22 feet in diameter and covered beneath mounds of earth in hills about two feet above the burial chamber, though these was probably once much higher and had been washed away by rain.

"When we opened the first of these graves it had an oak bottom, black as ink, but stained with a green copper oxide from an ancient bronze vessel. In this grave we found two skeletons; under the head of one was the blade of a poignard or knife, and the hand of this skeleton rested on the body of the other. In the other cist were two more skeletons, one of which was in a sitting posture with an erect spear in its hand. Many of the academic gentlemen came to look and they decided the graves must be older than Roman, probably Celtic.

"Mind you there is one way to find out – and that's to ask those who were buried there. One of the workmen stole the skull of the sitting skeleton and carried it to his own cottage at Whittlesford. Since then village people say that the headless skeleton of an ancient warrior knocks every night at his door demanding to have its head back!"

[source – Chronicle 13 Nov 1818]

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Elliott Smith had various other archaeological discoveries to relate – of how skeletons of a man, woman and child had been dug up from a pit at Little Downham together with a knife that had been buried with them. Then there was a small iron coffin found about eight feet down by men excavating gravel in Barnwell. It contained nothing but a few ashes of an infant about two feet long. The most interesting thing about this to Smith was that iron coffins are usually supposed to be a modern invention – so it only proves there is nothing new under the sun.

"Take abandoned boats. I've heard rumours of how workmen digging near the North Drain in Deeping Fen have struck upon an ancient canoe. From what I hear that's made of oak and about 46 feet long. All the ribs are there about four feet apart, together with a number of planks. I've not seen this one, but I know of other Viking boats that have been discovered deep in the fens"

But it was the discovery of a more recent boat that caught Pickwick's attention. "A boat of very large dimensions was seen completely iced-in up near Wisbech in that cold February of eight years ago. A couple of local lads saw it stuck, took a chance and walked out to it across the ice. They clambered on board and called out for the crew. But there was nobody on it, neither sight nor sign of them – it was a ghostly ship, completely abandoned.

"So they explored below decks and found it was loaded with tobacco, spirits and other cargo to the value of over £2,000. There's little doubt that the goods were contraband and the smugglers, not being able to free the boat from the great quantity of ice and fearful of being made prisoner, had decided to abandon it and let the boat take its chances. The discoverers declared her as their prize and as soon as the temperatures warmed up took her to the shore near Long Sutton. But the news had spread ahead of them and the Customs and Excise men were on board almost before they'd got her tied up. They seized the goods, loaded them on to wagons and carted them off towards Wisbech.

“But the bankers who infest that area ambushed the wagons on the way; there was by all accounts a formidable battle, but at last they succeeded in pulling off the wagon wheels to ensure the cargo could not go any further. Then reinforcements arrived and the villains were overpowered by sheer weight of numbers. The vehicles were repaired and with a large troop of excisemen guarding the rear they made their way safe into Wisbech.

“Mind you that’s not the only crime up in that part of the world. About they same time there were a number of nigh time raids on various stable yards around Salter’s Lode and Nordelph. The farmers knew someone was about for their dogs would bark and the horses whinny, they turned out with their guns, did a survey of the farmyard, counted the number of animals in the stable, and then went back to bed. Only in the morning did they realise what the thieves had been after. They’d pulled the hair from the manes and tales of the horses! Some animals were so disfigured that the owners could not recognise them. The police started an investigation and traced the hair to a buyer in Swaffham – but how do you prove it actually came from one horse rather than another?

“And how do you prove who’s the mother of a murdered baby – especially one that’s had its head chopped off and been thrown in a privy? That was one of the cases Hugh Evans, the coroner, had to deal with at Ely. A chap named Neal had just moved into a tenement in Newnham and was doing what you always have to do – empty the privy the last tenant’s been using. Well it was then he found the body of this poor little baby boy. But whose was it? Obviously suspicion fell on the previous tenants, especially as the 16-year old daughter had been seen to be in the family way. It took the police some time to put two and two together but eventually she was arrested and took to trial. The girl confessed that she’d done it, all on her own. Well the coroner’s jury came out with a verdict of murder but it’s not over yet. The girl told police where she’d hidden the knife. Only it wasn’t where she said and now there’s suspicions that there must have been somebody else involved as well. But at least the poor mite will have a better burial than a stinking bog!”

[Sources – Chronicle 11 Mar 1837 p2 (baby), 12 Aug 1830 – abandoned boat & horse hair]

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But the greatest archaeological discovery had been here in the heart of Cambridge, Smith continued. In 1816 workmen had been digging in the foundations of the old Dolphin Inn near where Alderman Newling had his coal yard. They got about four feet down when they struck into a mound of black soil. Within it they discovered the mouldered remains of a leather bag out of which there fell, jingling, a parcel of gold rings together with other valuable articles.

Many of them were quickly spirited away before the story leaked out; indeed the whole discovery would have been hushed up had not the workmen started squabbling between themselves as to who should have what. The news quickly reached the ears of the owner of the estate and he came down and seized whatever there was left. Smith had been called in to cast his appraiser’s eye over the curious relics, which had obviously been buried for some 500 years – well before the foundation of the University.

There was a sapphire set in a ring of pure gold, weighing over four pennyweights; it was similar to the ring taken out of the coffin of John de Fontibus, Bishop of Ely, who died in 1225. This was just the start; there were two amethysts, an unknown small gem and a large brooch of pure gold mounted in silver which was once studded with rubies, only one of which remained. A small brilliant gold Fleur de Lis, obviously broken from some trinket that had disappeared, a piece of coral set in silver – and then a collection of silver pennies. It was these latter that gave the best clue as to the date the hoard had been buried.

Three of the pennies were called ‘sterlings’; each had originally been struck to weigh ‘thirty-two wheat corns in the middle of the ears’ – and that remained the weight of the more perfect examples at the day of their discovery. Some of the other coins were rather decomposed and were brittle – but they had been made that way for it was then usual to strike pieces off them to small payments. They all carried the head of a King with the inscription ‘Henricus Rex III’ – they dated from the reign of Henry III back in the 1200s.

John Bowtell – the elder – had been particularly interested and had delved back into his collection of ancient documents to try and discover any clues as to who may have buried them. His theories linked the hoard to the mysterious story of the first Cambridge Mayor and the School of Pythagoras. Pickwick settled more comfortably into his pew as the younger Bowtell told his uncle’s tale.

Just across the road from the church of All Saints stands the college of St John; in much more distant times it had been the site of a Hospital dedicated to the same Saint. And beyond that was a stone house that once belonged to the Dunning family. They were obviously rich and owned extensive lands in and around Cambridge. The father had died about 1150 leaving two sons, Gilbert and Eustace. Gilbert had estates in Gransden and Gamlingay but Eustace lived in the stone house. He had three sons and one daughter who went into St Radegund’s nunnery – the present Jesus College. After Eustace died the house passed to his son Hervey who became one of the most prominent of Cambridge citizens. When in 1201 King John granted the burgesses the right to have a Gild Merchant and appoint their own Mayor it was Hervey that they selected.

Hervey was fully aware of his own importance and claimed knightly rank. He was a fighter and was not averse to challenging others to fight him over any dispute be it in the field of battle or in court. In fact he was constantly at law, asserting his rights to lands in Babraham, Girton, Chesterton, Madingley or Cheveley. One of his biggest disputes was over land at Gamlingay formerly owned by his brother Gilbert but now claimed by Martina Picot. When the law courts failed him he challenged her son to fight him for it. But the lad pleaded sickness so four knights were sent out to assess just how bad he was. They came back saying it was just a sham so a date was set for the tourney. The lad protested that the knights selected were his mortal enemies and had lied about his illness. When that was rejected he claimed that his champion – who would take to the field in place of himself – had been thrown into prison and could not fight till released. The duel never took place, when they ran out of excuses the Picots gave up their claim – but it was not the end of Hervey’s battle.

[Source – Chronicle 5 Sept 1817 J.M. Gray. The school of Pythagoras. 1932]

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Pickwick heard how Hervey Dunning had owned the biggest and best stone house in Cambridge – the one now called the School of Pythagoras. He also had so much other property that he could ensure his popularity with the church by giving land to the nuns of St Radegund, where his sister Roda had taken the veil. But times were hard and by 1237 he was reduced to borrowing six and a half marks from Isaac, son of Samuel the Jew. It was a small sum and many others were also borrowing, but it marked a significant change in the family’s fortunes.

Harvey died shortly afterwards leaving two sons, Eustace and Thomas. While other Dunnings were Mayors and Bailiffs of Cambridge and represented their town in Parliament, Eustace was the black sheep of the family. He became embroiled in an unsavoury dispute at Soham after the Prior of Ely had sent some men to eject some of the convent's tenants from their holdings. The tenants did not submit peaceably; a large mob forced the prior’s men to retreat

back to the Ely convent and demonstrated outside the gate. There was no actual violence but certain people who were suspected of other offences had been noticed in the crowd and the sheriff was directed to investigate their part in the riot.

Amongst these was Eustace Dunning. He was suspected of robbery from the house of Roger, the king's tailor, though nothing could be proved. He claimed that on the day of the riot he had taken a meal in the convent and slept the night at the house of Hugh de Camera in Ely, but had not been seen in the town since that date.

Then in 1256 he followed his family's predilection for litigation by challenging Robert le Rus, a member of another prominent Cambridge family, over land in Cambridge and Chesterton. Although Eustace won his case it was at the expense of heavy legal fees, forcing him into the first of several transactions.

He got his money from a lawyer, Master Guy Barnard Castle from Durham, demising to him all his property in Cambridge and Chesterton. In exchange Master Guy agreed to pay fourteen marks of silver as yearly rent. The Stone House was included in the grant, though Eustace continued to live there. But this was not enough to get him out of his troubles. Step by step he began to sell off other parts of his inheritance, a cottage here, another there. Then the time came when Eustace needed a large sum of money quickly and had to turn once more to Master Guy.

This time he mortgaged all his property in return for £100 which he agreed to repay at Michaelmas 1260 otherwise Guy kept the land. But Master Guy was skilled in the art of driving usurious bargains and Eustace only ever received £81. 3s. 4d. of the promised £100. It was no surprise that when Michaelmas came Eustace could not pay and had to apply to his creditor for further time. Master Guy did not at once foreclose. He granted a further bond under which Eustace agreed to repay £100 in the church of St Peter-next-the-Castle one Sunday in 1261. If he failed to pay this time all the mortgaged lands were to go to Master Guy forever. The appointed Sunday came but once more Dunning did not bring the money to church with him.

Two years later he needed yet more money and again had recourse to Master Guy. But the days when he could borrow on an extensive scale were past. This time the loan amounted to just twelve marks and three shillings and was secured upon land at Chesterton. Then before the year was out, Eustace wanted another loan, another fourteen marks secured on other land in Chesterton. After 1264 the loans ceased, it was obvious the money would never be repaid.

Master Guy did not evict Eustace at once: he did not want the property for himself, he wished to sell it. But the time was not ripe, the Kingdom was in turmoil with rogue barons harrying the countryside around Ely. Before things quietened down both parties had died. But both had successors to carry on the fight. Guy was succeeded by his brother John though he soon died leaving his nephew William of Mansfield as his heir. Eustace was followed into the Stone House by his son Richard, a fiery young man already under investigation for suspected murder. Could he retain the ancient house within the Dunning family?

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By the time Richard Dunning came into his inheritance the old Stone House off Northampton Street had been mortgaged and the mortgage defaulted on. It was only a matter of time before it was sold off. But nobody seemed to want it. Then out of the blue in 1270 came an Oxford

man, Walter of Merton. He put in an offer for the whole estate and Richard had no option but to get out. He moved out to his property in Gamlingay but his debts pursued him and soon he sold that land too to the man from Oxford.

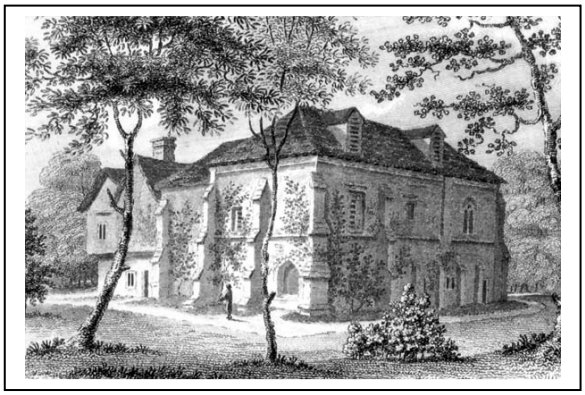
The new owner was a lawyer. He had been educated at Merton Priory in Surrey and then at Oxford where he'd funded Merton college. But he was worried about the future. It was a time of great uncertainty and there was every possibility that the new University at Oxford might fail. Already a number of students had moved to Northampton after a town and gown riot. Walter had previously established a small foundation at Malden in Surrey and thought the Cambridge stone house might prove another useful refuge for students.

But the worst of his expectations were not realised and by 1274 there was what passed for peace in Oxford, his students would continue to be safe there after all. So instead he put in a steward and bailiff to farm the Cambridge estate.

Then in 1446 King Henry VI was looking to expand his newly founded College of St Nicholas and St Mary in Cambridge – the one later called King's College. The Stone House lands would be ideal for that purpose so the King negotiated a land swap; Merton College could have the manor of Stratton St Margaret in Wiltshire in exchange. This was agreed provided they could have their old lands back should there be any problems. This proved a wise move as within a few years they were ousted during Wars of the Roses and returned to their old Cambridge property.

Their relief at regaining the stone house was tempered with the realisation that whilst they'd been away much of their lands had been misappropriated by other Colleges. Over the next few centuries various properties were built near the Stone House to house the labourers on their farms, together with a pub, The Bell, which caused the road name to be altered from Merton Hall Lane to Bell Lane.

Elliott Smith knew the Stone House well; his trained eye could unravel its story. It had originally been a single range constructed in the twelfth century but had suffered from the failure of the foundations and been rebuilt with buttresses to keep it standing. Fortified to withstand the ravages of outlaw barons or brawling townsfolk from the nearby taverns, it had been considerably altered in the 1600s when it was converted into a barn, though even before that tenants had kept pigs in the undercroft. The principal damage had occurred within the last 50 years when many of the original features had been destroyed. In 1808 the north wing had been converted by Newton Bosworth into the 'Merton Hall Academy', a boarding school for young gentlemen, though this had failed after three years.



But it could still be turned back to the home it had once been facing south towards the river though the new St John's college rooms had somewhat spoilt the view. This would be a good time as with the construction of the new Workhouse in Mill Road the old St Giles' parish workhouse would soon no longer be needed. It currently comprised six cottages where men, women and children previously huddled together quite peacefully except for one man, mad and raving like a wild beast, who lay on straw in a barred room. The buildings were currently let to Benjamin Clark for £20 a year and called 'Gentle's Yard' after the chief tenant who was coffin maker to the Workhouse.

But what of its old name – where did Pythagoras come into it? Why that was a result of the lying match between the two rival universities as to which was the older, invoking the names of ancient scholars to prove their point and leaving history to prove them wrong.

[J.M.Gray. The School of Pythagoras. 1932]
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The open aspect to the School of Pythagoras had been curtailed in recent years as the colleges continued to expand, Elliott Smith continued. Trinity had considered building across the river but eventually had rejected the idea. But the pressure to take more and more students was overwhelming and St John's college had finally grasped the nettle.

Even so their first choice had been to continue along the eastern bank of the river, towards the Great Bridge. But when they couldn't acquire the land they turned to Merton instead and negotiated for some of their pond area on which to build a new court containing sufficient accommodation for some 120 fellows and scholars. In 1825 they invited three of the leading architects to come up with designs. William Wilkins declined – he had had enough of college building, what with all the fuss at Trinity.

He'd been asked to submit a scheme for them back in 1821; he'd been told it was urgent so he scrapped around and drew up the plans in three months. The college considered them, thought they were fine and asked him to work up detailed specifications. But then the wrangling started. Some of the Fellows argued that a new quadrangle would spoil the beauty of the college and would involve the destruction of their brewhouse and stables, others said that the rush of students might only be temporary. The debate continued for two years before they decided to go ahead with most of what he'd originally planned.

Then they started thinking about how to fund it; some of the money was to come from loans but most by seeking subscriptions from old college members. The college issued an appeal stressing how serious the need was because of the evils arising from having young men lodging in the town: increased expense, scanty accommodation and the unhealthiness of some of the lodging houses. What's more they didn't allow the same degree of superintendence and discipline or give the same undisturbed opportunities for study that men would get if they were actually based within college walls.

Many of the old students had experienced these conditions for themselves, and appreciated just how much they had enjoyed the extra freedom. Several did not reply to the begging letter, others sent just a little, saying how bad conditions were for farmers just at that time. But King George came up with £1,000 and enough others responded so that they could employ a builder. They chose Spicer Crowe from London and he started clearing the site, promising to have everything completed in just over two years.

Matters were delayed while they arranged a formal ceremony for the laying of the first stone on the King's birthday – hoping he'd be there. But he wasn't, so the Speaker of the House of Commons came instead. Sounds grand until you realise that he was one of the University Members of Parliament, Charles Manners-Sutton, whose son was up at Trinity. Nevertheless it was one of those grand college occasions, everybody assembling in the Senate House and processing down to Trinity where there was a band of music ready to play 'God Save the King' (just in case he'd changed his mind after all). Then they proceeded to the building site, watched by a bevy of ladies. We had the usual Latin speeches then some gold and silver coins were placed in a cavity and the foundation stone laid on top of it. William Wilkins – relieved to see the scheme started at last – passed a silver trowel to the Master, who passed it to the Speaker who spread the mortar while the band struck up again. Then it was prayers and the dignitaries dispersed for a feast, leaving the builders to get on with the job.

They hit problems from the start in finding secure foundations and then the college kept coming up with changes to the design. Wilkins wanted to make it symmetrical and give it a classical front to harmonise with the Wren library, but his ideas were vetoed. Then he planned to remodel the south side of Nevile's Court but here too his designs were changed to make way for more rooms. Then to cap it off there was a fire which meant so much money had to be spent on repairs that they couldn't afford the stone finish except on the river front. Even so the job came in nearly £13,000 over estimate. Put it all together and the whole thing was a nightmare. No wonder he refused to get involved with another big job next door!

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By 1824 St John's College had to face the problem that it had more men wanting to attend than it had space for them. The only option was to build on the other side of the river. If William Wilkins refused to design it for them then somebody else would.

John Mead was one man who could see an opportunity; he heard rumours of the scheme and submitted a set of designs before the college had actually decided to go ahead. Mead was the architect for the new observatory in Madingley Road in 1822, but his plans, showing a three-sided court with the open end flanking the river did not appeal.

Arthur Browne of Lincoln had a vision of a four-sided court in open parkland with the east range flanking the river. But his building was heavy in appearance similar to a castle or prison, rather than a large country house in open parkland and it was felt that his design did not take advantage of the potential views towards Trinity.

The scheme that attracted the college more was a partnership between Thomas Rickman & Henry Hutchinson. Their central section was to be at right-angles to the river and crowned by a glazed lantern with light buttresses and pinnacles that some wags dubbed a 'wedding cake'. An eastern wing ran alongside the river and was joined to a western by an arched cloister and central gate-tower, which formed an airy scenic foil to the massive building. Best of all it had a splendid view of the Backs through the cloisters' unglazed windows.

There was one problem: how were students to get to the new building. Whilst others planned to use the original Kitchen Bridge, Rickman planned a new river crossing. He first envisaged a suspension bridge, then he changed his mind and designed an iron footbridge. But it was his proposal for a stone covered edifice complete with bars which would prevent burglars entering or undergraduates escaping from college that won the day and the 'Wedding Cake' would be linked by a 'Bridge of Sighs'.

One great technical difficulty that had to be overcome was the problem of the soft subsoil and the possibility of the river flooding into the eastern range. Rickman decided to raise the floor level two feet above the river and excavate down twelve feet to gain a firm foundation. This would allow the college to construct a cellar that could perhaps be rented out to Thomas Nutter for storing his coal.

This was a useful bargaining tool because they would need access to the site and the easiest way was from Magdalene Street through Nutter's existing coal yard. It all took great debate before the college bursar, Charles Blick, finally negotiated an agreement. Under it workmen, with their horses, waggons, carts and other carriages would have a right of way through Nutter's premises and over his bridge across the Bin Brook for seven years on payment of an annual rent of £20. The college would fund a new wharf where barges could deliver the bricks – which would be a positive benefit long after work was finished – provided he allowed them to use his terrace beside the river for storing materials.

There would be disruption on both sided but in the end both would benefit.

[SCAN OF VIEW OF ST JOHN'S COLLEGE FROM MAGDALENE BRIDGE BEFORE WORK STARTED; NUTTER'S COAL YARD IS ON THE RIGHT WITH THE OLD WHARF WHICH WOULD BE REPLACED BY THE COLLEGE WHERE BARGES UNLOADED, 33.03]

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Faced with the problems of building a new court for St John's College on the marshy ground beside the river the architects considered their options. There was no doubt that the whole site would need to be raised and this would require as much material as they could get. Fortunately King's College were busy excavating foundations for their new screen and south range and some 1,150 cart loads of earth were soon forming part of a procession of carts transporting gault, clay and rubbish to the site.

Before any building work could start they had to dam the river to allow the foundations to be laid. This was contentious since it would disrupt the river trade plying down to Mill Pool but there was no alternative. Pumps were installed and soon the bed of the river became visible together with lumps of coal and other items lost or otherwise deposited in it. Labourers set to work removing tons of peat until the underlying gravel was finally exposed, then old ship timbers were laid to give support to the foundations before a mass of brickwork was built upon with vaulted arches ensuring that even the lowest rooms remained dry despite their waterlogged situation.

Work progressed steadily until the main carpenter and building contractor, Thomas Phipps of Surrey, died only a year into the job. This plunged the project into difficulty and the college had to pay the workmen's wages to keep them on site, forking out £160 a week for several months. But despite it all by January 1830 most of the construction was completed and the workmen were entertained to food, punch, ale and tobacco.

Inevitably it had not gone according to plan; the college had changed its mind over substantial details, substituting Ketton stone for much of the planned brickwork and quibbling over Rickman's travelling expenses from his Birmingham office. They patched up their differences and when it was over the college presented him with a silver inkstand worth £30 with a letter wishing him a long enjoyment of health and happiness, if consistent with the will of Providence. Sadly Rickman's colleague, young Henry Hutchinson died aged just 31 years before the building was finally complete. People speculated that his work by the putrid waters of the river Cam had contributed to his demise.

It was left now to the college to work out the sums and see how they could pay for it all. They had started a building fund that had risen to £10,000, the Master added another £2,000 out of his own pocket and the Duke of Northumberland came up with £500 more. Sadly other donations did not match that generosity and all told amounted to £17,000. This still left over £60,000 to find.

They had arranged for a Government loan of £40,000 but this now had to be increased. The money came at a price: the interest rate was hiked up to five percent, a sum they could not afford. The Master wrote to the University Member of Parliament, Viscount Palmerston who appealed to F.J. Robinson, Chancellor of the Exchequer: "If the full rate of interest is extracted from them they must build castles in Spain instead of a new court at Cambridge". He continued, "let me appeal to you as a good Johnian to help them in this matter if you can".

The college was confident this would do the trick – had the Chancellor not been one of their fellow commoners and so be aware of the influence their support could bring him. In this were sadly mistaken, the rate remained unchanged and within a year Robinson had been promoted to Prime Minister. Now they were deep in debt and trusting that student number would stay high enough to produce some income from their new rooms.
[Scan 22.02 Source: A. Crook. From the foundation to Gilbert Scott. 1980]

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To many folk St John's was not the college they associated with the Wedding Cake across the river but the pie from the kitchen, as Bowtell explained.

"From Christmas day to January 6th each year they have what they call their ''open nights' when the Fellows and their guests, after dining in hall, adjourn to the Combination Room where a supper is sent up. It always comprises a boar's head, chine of pork, turkey, tongues, jellies and so on. But the main treat is the 'Large Pie' decorated with a model of some part of the college; one of the favourite themes is their new 'Bridge of Sighs', the stonework made of gum pastry and the stone copings to the windows made of sugar-work.

"But it is not just the dons that the college feeds. Each Thursday around December at half-past-five a queue forms in front of the kitchens. About 50 poor folk from the four parishes nearest the college come together: pitiful caricatures of men and women, poor puny wastrels, starvelings, degenerates, the old, destitute, poor and infirm all huddled together in the cold.

"Then one of the senior Fellows arrives, all dressed in cap and gown and the college butler brings him a silver bowl of soup. The don samples it, declares it good and then each of the people waiting receives a gallon of the broth, with a large loaf of bread. The broth is first served on St John the Evangelist Day, December 27th, and in the twelve weeks following; it's a rich mixture of vegetables and lentils and is always served on High Table the same night.

"They say is the oldest custom in Cambridge, dating back to the charity distributed by the Hospital of St John the Evangelist before the foundation of the college. This was always one of their functions, providing food and shelter for travellers and at St John's they have a tangible reminder of the past within their chapel building. Although there's no actual provision for such largess in the college archives – at least none that uncle could find - it has taken place for years now and is an act of charity that is greatly appreciated by everybody except the Charity Commissioners!"

The words 'Charity Commissioners' were expressed with such venom that the normally placid Bowtell seemed about to burst into fury. "Jumped up, busybodies, poking and probing into things they should leave to god-fearing folk to tend to; it is hard enough to distribute charity without having everything challenged by officials such as that d*mn*d pair of fools, Martin and Miles. They came down here with their parliamentary warrant and questioned us about how we were administering Susannah Forrester's bequest.

"She was a widow-woman who left the parish a large house and five cottages in Bridge Street that we had rent out and keep in repair. She tried to sweeten the minister by saying he was to have a pound a year for preaching a sermon here in All Saint's church with another pound to provide dinners for the churchwardens and charity trustees. Then after the meal we'd have to read over her bequest and make sure we knew what it said. The rest of the money was to be given to five ancient widowers and five ancient widows provided they stayed sober and didn't leave the parish.

“By the time Martin and Miles started their probing both Elliott and myself were amongst the trustees. We had to account for the property – houses, stables, warehouses and the Falcon Public House – all of which had been let before we were appointed. Thank God we’d kept them in fair repair; we’d sorted out investments to maintain them and also kept to the proper amount for the dinners. So well and good.

“But then they started to complain that we hadn’t been giving the charity money to the right mix of people, saying how we’d given more away to women rather than old widowers. They don’t seem to realise that there aren’t as many old men around – most of them have either been nagged to death early or have left the parish to find work elsewhere. Then they kept probing as to whether those we did give the money to were actually from the parish. Well we knew that lots of people purposely moved to this part of Cambridge just so they could benefit from the charity and we try and make sure we weed these out. But if you’re desperate to find an old widower and one appears at the right time, well it stands to reason you’re going to be grateful to hand the money out as he is to get it!”

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It became apparent that the old friends gathered in All Saints church were not of one mind as regarding the qualities of Martin and Miles, the commissioners appointed by Parliament to enquire into the charities of Cambridgeshire. While to Bowtell they were busybodies poking their noses where they were not wanted, to Elliott Smith they were dedicated public servants seeking to remedy abuse. And they had found enough of that.

“Take the case of Edward Storey’s foundation for poor widows”, he continued. “When Storey died back in 1692 he left several properties and bits of land with the instruction that the trustees were to use the rents to build ten brick almshouses, each of two rooms with fireplaces in both. They were to be let to four widows of Church of England clergymen, two widows and one maiden from St Giles’ parish and three maidens from Holy Trinity. They had to be more than forty years old and stay sober – if not they’d be turned out. In addition to their lodgings they were to get a gown of sad-coloured cloth, two pairs of shoes and a pair of stockings each Christmas and Midsummer.

“But his widow Elizabeth did not agree; she and her son sold off one of the properties, The Red Cow, for £200 and spent the rest of the income. When the Charity people looked into the affairs in 1712 they found nothing had been done about building the almshouses and told her to get on with it. She took not the slightest bit of notice.

“After her death the inspectors looked into it again and appointed a new group of Trustees including Joseph Kettle and the Rector of St Giles’ parish. But they didn’t do anything either – apart from failing to account for the income they’d been receiving. So they were turfed out and replaced by the Vice Chancellor of the University and a couple of other dignitaries. They managed to lose £579 before they were replaced by a new lot. In the end they appointed various Masters of the Colleges including Francis Barnes of Peterhouse together with Frederick Cory the solicitor & Thomas Mortlock the banker”

Here Pickwick interrupted to enquire whether this was the same Francis Barnes who had only been appointed Master to spite the Fellows, the man whose bathchair he had borrowed; and that John Mortlock, surely he could not be related to the tyrant who had ruled the town of Cambridge so corruptly? Indeed it was.

“Then in 1805 there was great disruption caused by the inclosure of St Giles’ parish – and that was a good time for agents like myself”, continued Smith. “Various bits of land had to be sorted out and many of the rents being charged were far too low. Why some lands let to

Francis Beales went up from £100 to £160, though prices have dropped now and it's not worth that amount of money.

They asked me to survey Storey's other properties; the tan yard in Rowley's Yard and the Cow and Calf were in poor condition but they had a number of licensed premises including the Red Bull where the rent was doubled. The biggest site in the town centre was the Black Bear Estate off Sidney Street with the stables, forges, warehouses and Weston Hatfield's printing office where he produces his 'Cambridge Independent Press' – all that was worth over £672 rent.

"And then there was the Red Lion inn, Petty Cury. Now that was a difficult one to value. You see William Mitchell and his father had laid out nearly £3,000 in improvements over the years and had really made the Inn a thriving concern. It ought to have been worth a lot of money to the Trustees. But there was a problem. Part of the frontage, including the coffee-room, kitchen, cellar and several of the bedrooms are the property by Emmanuel College. I can tell you it was a nightmare trying to come up with a fair figure and when I submitted it to Martin and Miles they called in Benjamin Bridges for a second opinion. Now old Benjamin and I get on well together and he confirmed my findings. This pleased the Commissioners – they called me 'a competent appraiser' in their big report and I got a lot of work showing them around the county after that.

As for the widows: some are accommodated in old houses in Northampton Street, two of them overrun with vermin, and the rest in old stables in Rowley's Yard. There's talk of building some new almshouses but I doubt I shall live to see it. Well its been dragging on for nearly 150 years already!

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Typical of the problems the Charity Inquiry Commissioners had had to grapple with was the one that faced them in the isolated parish of Isleham, as Elliott Smith explained. Back in 1580 Lady Frances Peyton had decided she wanted to found a hospital for the relief of poor people. She laid down the rules and regulations she wanted followed and in August 1582 Robert her son and heir conveyed various houses and lands to the newly-appointed Trustees to allow it to go ahead.

There was to be a Master to administer it all; he got a big house with a barn and several acres of land on which he was to keep cows and horses and grow corn for which he was to pay an annual rental that would to support the beneficiaries. They were to be six men and six women who would be very comfortably off. Each was to have a house and a barn for their corn. One of the men was to be in charge and say prayers daily; he had a bit bigger house where he was to keep a chest with three locks, with him keeping one key, the Minister another and another trustee the last. In this he was to keep all the documents safe and sound.

But right from the start there were problems. One of the first Trustees, Sir John Maynard, got hold of the land and kept it for himself for several years. He thought that being a big man he could do what he liked in such a small isolated place. But those 'busybody' Charity people caught up with him and forced him to pay sixteen years' back rent and put the premises in good order. Even by then the affairs were in a mess, various bits of land had disappeared and several other acres seem to have been added in.

The earlier deeds mention a barn, but by January 1777 there was no sign of it. The site was supposed to be a very small parcel of land at the back of some turf lodges attached to the hospital. Mr. John Rumbelow owner of the field next door had enclosed this plot about 10 years ago but he had now admitted that it did belong to the Hospital.

There were supposed to be fifty acres of fen land belong to the charity where peat could be dug to keep the inmates' fires going – they got 3,000 turves annual. However the only spot where fuel is now dug is a piece of land containing just 13 acres. This was let by auction in July 1831 but Turner the tenant had now become insolvent owing £18 and John Brown owed the charity another £10. Apart from this however the rents appeared to have been regularly received.

It was not the only difficulty. An old account book said the Lord of the Manor was to pay £2 a year to the hospital under the terms of Lady Peyton's bequest, but when the Commissioners studied the will itself they could find no mention of any such provision. There was another record of John Buller having made payment of £10 per annum for six years but nobody could find where this comes from either. There was mention of this payment when the Isleham estate had been advertised for sale in 1800 but this land had now been split up.

As for the beneficiaries of it all – there were more problems. There was supposed to comfortable accommodation for six widows and six widowers who were in reduced circumstances and past work. The inmates receive three shillings a week and they did get 20 bushels of malt between them along with seven pounds of beef each at Whitsuntide and Christmas, though now they prefer to have the money instead.

But the tenements are in such bad condition and so uncomfortable that nobody wants to live there. As there are now just five two-room dwellings under one roof so the number of almspeople has had to be reduced from 12 to 10. This includes the master who is the only one permitted to marry with his wife being considered one of the women. The previous master had died in July 1833 but the trustees weren't willing to turn his widow out and so couldn't appoint a replacement

"You know", concluded Smith, "that's a rum job when in this time of hardship they can't find enough Isleham people prepared to take charity!"

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As Elliot Smith explained the Charity Inquiry men had discovered various oddities as they had probed into each parish in Cambridgeshire. At Caxton money from the Leeds' Charity was distributed to parishioners who found themselves in Cambridge gaol, at Little Eversden Charles Deer had willed his money to ensure that one patient a month could attend Addenbrooke's Hospital, though the hospital authorities were complaining that this was too many.

Money was distributed in different ways. At Little Gransden James Musgrave had left a bequest to be distributed to every poor widow or widower who should personally attend his family's vault at six o'clock in the morning of 31st May each year. And if there was any left over then one shilling could be given to any other poor family until the money was all used up. Needless to say there were always a lot of people about early that morning!

At Fulbourn the Farmer's Charity was restricted to married people with families, widows or widowers. The trustees compiled a list of names which were written on tickets and put into a bag. Then on Sunday morning thirty names were drawn out and if the lucky people were actually in church then they received sixpence, otherwise they lost out. It proved a very successful way of ensuring a good congregation, at least at the start of the charity year. But attendance dropped as once the name-ticket had been selected it was placed in a second bag to be drawn again once the first was empty and the church pews filled up once more.

There were also irregularities and scope for fiddling. At Bottisham there were problems over the Poors' Fen land which was divided between the poor of Quy, Fen Ditton and Horningsea,

each having the right to dig turf and cut stover. The land was subject to a drainage tax and nobody got round to paying it. Eventually the drainage commissioners took action to sell off the land to recoup the amount owed. But nobody thought to tell the poor people concerned, in fact it seemed that the only person who did know was Henry King, an overseer and churchwarden. He showed up at the sale and bought he land at a knock-down price. This did not raise too many problems, for after all he was one of the people concerned in administering the charity. Only he hadn't bought it for them – he had bought it for himself. Soon he took steps to turf the peat-diggers off his land. But the villagers were not going to stand for this and were soon embroiled in a messy court case to re-establish their ancient rights.

The Over Town Lands charity owned various pieces of land that were rented to produce income to be divided amongst the poor. They included a licensed public house let at a rent of £24 a year. But by 1831 the tenant, a widow, had not paid the rent for three years. Instead of taking her to court one of the Trustees took her to church – he married her. Then he moved in to the pub alongside his new bride and carried on the trade, rent free. His companion trustees felt this was reasonable since between them they had a very large family who would otherwise become chargeable to the parish rates. But when the Inquiry men investigated they found that the man had recently sold a house in the village for £300 and that he also owned four acres of land. They recommended – strongly – that the two of them get out, or at least start to pay the rent again. Their advice had been heeded and the charity was now once more receiving an income from this part of its investments.

At Burwell the Inquiry men investigated the accounts for the previous 20 years; they found that over £573 had built up which the Vicar was planning to use to pay for repairs to his church roof. He had been a trustee for more than 20 years and produced the appropriate account books, regularly signed and audited. But when they probed a little deeper the Commissioners noticed that a new account book had been opened before the old one had been finished. And a comparison between the closing amount of the one and the opening account of the other revealed a discrepancy of over £420. They went over the figures carefully and questioned each trustee. One said he remembered the Vicar mentioning that he had enough money in hand to build an organ and repair the church but nobody had questioned where it came from. Although the vicar had brought the account book to every meeting they had not bothered to look at it. Nor did they know that he had used Charity money to ensure himself treatment at Addenbrooke's Hospital should the occasion arise. Now this might all have been above board but the matter had been referred to the Attorney-General for him to investigate.

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As the Charity Inquiry men had travelled throughout Cambridgeshire visiting communities large and small they frequently had need of an appraiser to ensure that the various trustees were obtaining full value for their assets. Elliott Smith as a professional auctioneer had been happy to oblige, taking the opportunity to jot down his own impressions of some of the property that might be coming onto the market, especially the former workhouses and Guildhalls, now that these were being replaced by the new Union workhouses.

At Girton there was a parish house divided into five tenements where the paupers lived rent-free. There was also a blacksmith's shop belonging to the charity that had been built about 1813 at a cost of £7; it was let for £1.15s a year – which Smith considered about right. At nearby Oakington the poors' houses were of a very mean description, one of them in bad condition despite the Trustees having spent over £140 on repairs, while at Waterbeach the almshouses that were home to six aged widows were in a wretched condition.

At Soham they found a tenement originally built as a place where the poor could be put to work, but now used by the churchwardens and overseers as accommodation for the poor

paying no rent. It was in quite good repair but some people thought it should be sold off for the benefit of the Soham Moor Charities in general or that rent should be charged. Gamlingay had almshouses bequeathed by Elizabeth Lane back in 1753 for the use of eight poor widows; they comprised 10 different dwellings all were in good repair, including one in Green End originally erected by Abraham Jacob and others in Cock Street.

Things were different at Stetchworth where in 1700 Lord Gorges and his wife had build almshouses for two poor men and two women. Each had four ground rooms and a garden plot. They had been rebuilt in 1805 and were in good repair. An older house called the Guildhall had been in very bad condition before it was pulled down and replaced by another erected at the expense of the parish.

Their travels had also taken them north into the fens, a very bleak place, but where there were grand houses as well as poor ones. At Benwick there was a large property called the 'Great House' inhabited by eight paupers and their families as well as six old mud and stud tenements, in middling repair and of little value which were inhabited rent-free by paupers. About 1826 two parish houses situated in Little London had fallen down and after nothing had been done for several months two labouring men, Daniel Rawlinson and James Skeeles, had built two cottages on the site, which they were now claiming as their freehold. That was something the Inquirers wanted looking in to.

There was something else to be investigated at Leverington. Here there were 21 town houses, half tiled, half of them thatched. All were inhabited by paupers who had never paid any rent; some had lived there for more than 20 year. But in 1825 the feofees of the town lands had paid Abraham Leahair, one of their co-trustees, £200 for the purchase of three cottages – included in the above - and the Inspectors were anxious to seek Elliott's opinion as to whether they had paid a fair price. He had concluded that it was, but then he had been in a good mood.

Smith often found the time dragging as he waited for the inquiry to conclude but at Leverington there had been something to do. For William Hawkins had left some money to buy books for anybody to read. Normally the privilege was restricted to those who came to the church before the beginning of morning or evening service, but the churchwardens had been happy to make an exception in his case. Not that they were too worried for by the terms of the will the books had to be chained up so that nobody ran off with them.

But then Leverington was a quirky place in several regards. Under John Swaine's charity the trustees had to supply three honest poor men with a strong kersey coat of cloth worth three shilling a yard together with a four-shilling pair of strong shoes. Nor were the women overlooked for three each got a strong gown made of serge together with a half-a-crown pair of shoes. But the investments had produced so much income that the recipients were now being completely clothed by the charity with hat, shoes, shirts and stocking for the men and body linen, cap, bonnet and shoes for the women. There was still enough for extra clothing to be supplied to other poor folk who turned up after evening service on the first Sunday in September.

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Although there might be a chained bible in Leverington church it was not much use if people did not known how to read. In centuries past various charities had been established to provide a modicum of education for their parish children; some of these schools were still thriving, the Charity Inquirers had found, others were less than efficient.

At Melbourn back in 1690 William Ayloff had endowed a free school to instruct 40 children of the poorest sort, provided they were Protestants and the children of Protestants. They were to be instructed until they could read English, write a plain and legible hand and make answer

to questions on the catechism in presence of a congregation. The teacher was to be a fit person, discreet and sober of good conversation; he would be removed if he become careless and negligent or in any wise scandalous or guilty of any crime which might be of bad example to make him unfit for the government of youth. Until recently the children had been taught in the church but the school had now been discontinued, though the master who was very old and infirm still resided nearby and continued to receive his usual income.

Ayloff's school had been superseded by a free school endowed by John Trigg of Melbourne Bury. In 1818 he'd left £2,000 to be invested in the education of children of poor parents of all religious denominations paying attention to their religious and moral improvements. In 1824 the trustees took out a 14-year lease on two barns which had been converted into schoolroom. The children were instructed in reading, writing and arithmetic and girls also learnt plain work. The Inquirers found the school to be well conducted with an average attendance of 165 boys and 124 girls. But it was not a free education: scholars paid one penny a week and if absent for 14 days needed written permission from a trustee before they could return.

The Charity men were adamant that a small payment caused a greater value to be attached to school than if instruction was free. They cited the example of Waterbeach where reading was free but writing and arithmetic cost threepence together with a small contribution for firing from each scholar. At Histon it was more complicated: children aged over seven were taught reading and arithmetic free but had to pay a penny a week if they wanted to learn to write. The money was to go towards the pens, ink and paper – at least they had paper rather than scratching the words with a stick on the earth floor as in some places. But that was not the only charge: those under seven were required to pay 2d a week and the children of those whose parents earned enough to contribute to the rates paid from 4d to 10d according to the instruction the children received. Despite this there were about 70 scholars in winter and from 20-30 in summer when there was money for children to earn in the fields.

But Harlton where all children of both sexes were instructed free the school never attracted more than 20 poor children aged 4-11 and little was learnt despite the best efforts of the present master who was attentive to his duties. It had not always been so: the previous teacher – the parish clerk - had been dismissed for incompetence. Despite this he continued to live in the schoolmaster's house: he should be turned out and the present teacher moved in, they recommended

Teachers had been a problem elsewhere; at Grandsen there had been complaints that the master was of a violent temper and did not properly attend to his duties – he left the instruction of the pupils in a great measure to his 14 years old son. At Oakington two teachers had been removed for misconduct and the wages of the present masters reduced from £26 to £20. This was not due to their ineptitude but because of the expenses of the inclosure process forcing the managers to cut costs somehow.

There was a different problem at Cottenham where Thomas Haird had been appointed master in 1828 on death of his father. This caused great controversy, not because of his abilities, but because of his birth: he was not born in Cottenham and this had been a stipulation by Catherine Pepys when she had endowed the charity in 1703.

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Elliott Smith told Pickwick that some parishes had schools that had been first endowed centuries ago. Take the case of Burrough Green where the first school had been endowed by the will of Dr Anthony Cage in 1630. He'd left land to be rented out with the income being

first used to bind out some poor child as an apprentice and the remainder to employ some poor woman to teach the village's poor children to read English. .

But then in August 1709 Dr. Thomas Watson, Bishop of St. David's, had left a house and land to pay the salary of a 'good, able and sufficient master or mistress' to teach the children of the poorest inhabitants to read the Bible, Catechism and other Godly books. Should no such schoolmaster or schoolmistress be had the money was to be distributed to the poor. By the time the Inquirers visited the house was in bad condition. But that was not the end of the matter.

In the 1730s a new schoolhouse had been erected. This one was the result of the benefaction by Samuel Richardson who left various lands to pay for a master. He was to be grave, sober and an orthodox member of the Church of England with preference to be given to the curate of Burrough Green (providing he qualified, and if he didn't what was he doing being curate anyway!). He was to instruct the poorest children in reading the Bible, writing a fair hand and arithmetic. There were one or two other stipulations: directions were given for morning and evening prayers and for instruction in psalmody. In addition the master and the scholars were to attend church and to make the responses, unless excused by the curate. At the end of it all there was to be an examination; those who passed received a Bible and Prayer-book worth six shillings. But in any case once the children could read well they were to be turned out to make way for others.

There was no mistaking the school for over the entrance are two niches in which stand two stone children. The one on the left is a figure of girl holding a bible in her left hand and a scroll in her right with the words 'Come ye Children' carved on it. Beside her and headed 'Naked and Ye Clothed Me' is a boy with a bible and a broad-brimmed hat under his left arm. Either side are two buildings, forming wings to the school-house. At the time of the inspection one was inhabited by the schoolmaster while the other, which had formerly been a home for decayed housekeepers, was being let by him at a rent of five pounds four shillings a year.

John Charville, the master, had been appointed in 1821 on the death of his father. He told the Inquirers that the school was attended with from 50 to 60 children - but when questioned it transpired that in the summer months there were not more than half or two-thirds of that number. Most of them were girls who learned reading, writing, and arithmetic with sewing in addition (for which he charged an extra payment of threepence per week). They all did very well - he gave away about five Bibles annually - though he admitted it was more as a matter of course than as the result of an examination. Asked why they no longer attended church as they were supposed to he said that a Sunday-school had now been established and there was no need.

Under the terms of the foundation various clergy and local justices of the peace had been appointed as visitors to ensure the teacher did his work but the Charity men found the school to be very ill conducted, giving very little instruction. The master was a man of irregular habits and addicted to gambling. When appointed he had undertaken to teach an evening school, but soon gave this up. All in all he was most unsatisfactory and the rector was directed to dismiss him and appoint somebody better.

Whereas that school was in decline there was yet another, established in 1821 where from 10 to 15 boys and girls of the poorest classes from four years of age and upwards were instructed by a school-mistress in the first rudiments of reading and spelling. This school was very well conducted and the scholars attended regularly.

All this investigations had taken a considerable amount of time to sort out giving Elliott Smith opportunity to investigate other aspects of the village's history. These had revealed that however badly the teachers had behaved, the clergy had been more scandalous.

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To be fair much of the scandalous conduct attributed to the incumbent of Burrough Green had been a long while ago, Elliott Smith conceded, back in the turbulent times of the 1630s when Roundhead and Cavalier had contested their rights to worship in their preferred way.

The Puritans had cracked down on what they considered Catholic tendencies and had sent out commissioners to inquire into the behaviour of the clergy. The snoopers at Burrough Green had found plenty of people to complain about their rector, Thomas Wale. William Humphrey, Thomas Salbury, Robert Cuttell and Francis Norton had been amongst those who'd queued up to complain:

"He never preaches more than once a day – at least not till last Sunday, when he learned you were coming. He bows at the altar and at the name of Jesus although ordered not to by Parliament – but he curses Parliament, calls them rogues & wishes the pox of God to light upon them. He has ordered the parish constables to turn out any people who support the Roundheads.

"Nor does he observe the fast days so that we parishioners have to go to plough and do other work not fit to be done on that day. On the last fast day he had many people at his house drinking until they had drunk all the beer he had - and then he sent out for more. He's a notorious drunkard and gets angry with those that will not match him glass for glass even though they tell him that they cannot take it.

"He frequently goes to private houses in his parish and joins in eating cakes and beer which they have sent for from the alehouse. Sometimes he's invited strange women to be his companions who are notorious for their lewdness and lightness, and has used many uncivil actions, words and gestures to them.

"He is a common swearer, he familiarly raps out divers fearful oaths and uses base uncivil language. He is a common quarreller and has often challenged many and assaulted others. He's even pulled off his clerical gown to fight and has had to give large sums of money in compensation to various people he's fought with – including a common beggar"

But sometimes the parson was unable to settle out of court: "He rode over a woman on purpose near Quy Church, knocked her down and bruised her so badly that she died soon after. For this was indicted at the Cambridge assizes but was acquitted – though it is strongly supposed that he gave large bribes to get off, for he and his friends have confessed that it cost him almost two hundred pounds, which otherwise it could not have done"

In his defence Thomas Wake pointed out that he'd signed the Solemn League and Covenant as ordered by Parliament and that most of his detractors were not actually Burrough Green men. But it was all too much for him to deny – not that he was actually allowed to attend the inquiry in case he intimidated the witnesses. So he was turned out and a new minister appointed

A few years later, once King Charles II had been restored to the throne, Burrough Green had another incumbent, Robert Grymer who had also been previously turned out of his church at Wicken. There it was claimed he had indicted Thomas Cobb for not taking his hat off as he passed the back of the church when he was burying a body in the churchyard. Not that he was too particular over upholding religious principal and had insisted that his own men went out

to work on his field on Sundays, telling them he would pray for them to save them the bother of attending church.

Those that did attend church were a captive audience: he had berated his congregation from the pulpit demanding extra stipend and in an attempt to raise more income had sued John Johnson claiming he had not paid his tithes. When Johnson died the parson refused to bury the body until his widow had paid up.

It was a wonder how such men became appointed rector, but their offences were nothing when compared to that of Thomas Watson, Bishop of St David's who had followed succeeded Grymer, at least in name.

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Elliott Smith related how the scandalous activities at Burrough Green had captured the attention of churchmen throughout the country. It all revolved around Thomas Watson, Bishop of St David's.

Thomas had been appointed to be minister in the village in 1672 and was obviously a man of some wealth; he gave a house and land to the village school and bought himself the Temple manor at Great Wilbraham.

He also bought himself the Bishopric of St David's in Wales in 1687. That was a long way from his Cambridgeshire parish but instead of surrendering the living he decided to do what many another clergyman did: the would put in a curate to do the job for him and make a little extra cash on the side.

He looked around for a suitable candidate and found a ready applicant in William Brooks who came recommended for his sober and virtuous conversation and ministerial abilities. William had a wife who was something of an heiress in her own right, and that was useful.

The income of rectory was worth about £120 per annum but the Bishop would let William have it for the sum of 200 guineas. Within a couple of year's he'd have recovered his investment and be making a nice little profit. William was to reside in the Rectory, take care of the duties and accommodate the Bishop should he chose to visit.

The problem was that William did not have all that amount of money, he would need to get some of it from his wife's fortune and she was not keen on laying out her cash on a parsonage. Her husband was a sickly man and once he was dead the Bishop would take back the Rectory. And anyway Thomas could resign the living at any time and they'd have to move.

Negotiations continued, the Bishop promised not to resign and guaranteed Mrs Brooks that she could stay there for as long as he himself lived, regardless of the fate of her husband. So it was agreed and set down in writing, ready for signature. But once he'd received most of the money the Bishop changed his mind – he'd not sign unless the lease was just for William's lifespan. By this time the couple had already committed themselves too deeply and they had no option but to go ahead.

More expense was to follow. The Bishop travelled down to Burrough Green to sort out the details and charged them £30 for the hire of his coach and travelling expenses – including two bottles of wine and some papers of fruit. Despite this extravagance the costs should have been no more that three pounds and sevenpence – where had the rest gone? Not that there were any receipts to justify it – in fact the Bishop had been very careful to amend the written agreement so as to omit any reference to payment for this would have been against the law.

But the deception was not all one way; despite his testimonials William Brooks was not actually ordained when he took on the post. He had to employ two other clergy to perform the religious duties, but then he abandoned the practice and neglected to provide a minister at all until he was found out.

The complicated arrangement unravelled when Brooks died and his widow asked for the return of some of the money they'd paid to the Bishop. Rather than pay up Thomas offered her cash if she applied as a supplicant for his charity – there was of course nothing in writing to say he'd ever taken any money in the first place. Except that the canny Mrs Brooks had kept a note he'd written her during the negotiations; she let it be known that other people would pay her a handsome some for that incriminating evidence.

And so the matter came into the open and into the law courts: the granting of the lease had been simony and the Bishop was indicted. He argued that Brooks had been a failure and the source of much expense to him, that the price charged was not excessive and he had never been paid for various goods he had left in the Rectory. It was no defence & Watson was expelled from his Bishopric. He returned to his Temple at Wilbraham where he died excommunicate in 1717.

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If the scandal surrounding one Welsh Bishop Watson caused Cambridgeshire tongues to wag that surrounding another caused even more controversy, as John Bowtell explained.

"This was Richard Watson, Bishop of Llandaff and University Regius Professor of Divinity - previously Professor of Chemistry. He was a remarkable man in many ways though he knew nothing of chemistry or religion – at least not till he got the jobs.

"He came up to Trinity College Cambridge on a scholarship from a Westmoreland grammar school in 1754 – uncle described him as a somewhat provincial and uncouth youth who habitually wore a coarse mottle coat from his home county and blue stockings. He was ambitious but then he had to be for his father had left him but a small endowment. He threw himself into his studies but also made friends with his rich contemporaries. After a jolly evening in their company he always made up for it by working even harder next day, often going without his dinner.

"He was elected second wrangler of his year – and this caused tongues to wag, for all the examiners bar one had preferred him for the top position. The exception had been the leading moderator who favoured a young man who just happened to be one of his own private pupils - and it was St John's College's turn to have the top man that year. This snub, which Watson felt made him the subject of gossip throughout the University, added to his determination to reach the top of the tree and he soon gained a Fellowship of Trinity College.

"Then in October 1764 was elected Professor of Chemistry which was another matter which caused tongues to wag for even he admitted he knew nothing about the subject and had never even seen an experiment. But he studied hard and was soon attracting large audiences to his lectures – from each of whom he took a fee. Having given three lectures in a morning he then spent four or five hours with private pupils before moving on to his laboratories for five or six hours of experiments at night. He also did a lot of work on ways of improving the manufacture of gunpowder, being called in to advise the Government on the subject – and saving the country thousands of pounds in the process. Then he managed to persuade his Government friends to endow his Chair with a stipend of £100 – the first regular payments he could reply on, previously the job had been unpaid. Rewards followed him, he was elected a Fellow of the Royal Society and everybody thought he was settled for life.

“But he decided on a career change. Dr Rutherford the Regius Professor of Divinity died suddenly and Watson applied for the job. He had never studied religion but managed to wangle himself a degree of Doctor of Divinity that was conferred the day before he was due to deliver his probationary lecture. In his usual style he bluffed his way through and was duly elected. Only then he did he start to seriously study the bible taking little notice of the opinion of councils, churchmen or others who had devoted their lives to learned discourse on the subject. Mind you he did prefer his chemistry and spent much time back in the laboratory. True to form he also set about trebling the income for the post to more than £1,000 a year.

“By 1771 Professor Richard Watson, still only 34 years old, had obtained the highest office Cambridge University could bestow. But his ambition was not yet fulfilled. He turned to his Government friends for extra preferments and was appointed as Bishop of Llandaff. This is a poor, remote and neglected diocese often seen as a jumping-off point for something much better. But his then he luck ran out in those turbulent political times and he found he had made too many enemies.

“Once more he decided on a new career; he returned to the Lake District and become a farmer – which he did with the usual success. Of course he did not resign his Bishopric, nor did he surrender his University position and the income they brought him. He had a large family to support and needed all the cash he could accumulate. He held both posts till the day he died in 1816.

“But here in Cambridge people were murmuring until in 1799 one man said out loud what most were thinking. The only thing was that he was the editor of a Cambridge newspaper and he said it in print.”

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Benjamin Flower was a self-opinionated man; this was a benefit when you were editor of a Cambridge newspaper, even one which sold hardly any copies in the town itself. But then he was a London man and could never have expected anyone here to read what he printed anyway.

People say he had inherited a fortune from his father, a successful city businessman, but then lost the lot in speculation on the Stock Market. He’d tried trading, banking and education before undergoing a series of travels in Europe where he’d witnessed the French Revolution at first hand. Then his brother suggested he try his hand at newspaper publishing.

Flower found premises in Bridge Street and the first edition of ‘The Cambridge Intelligencer’ hit the streets in July 1793. It was in a similar four-page format to the established ‘Cambridge Chronicle’ but was radically different in tone. The first issue sold 650 copies and sales increased until by 1797 he was disposing of 2,700 papers a week. Bit it was never a commercial success, attracting very few advertisements, and when the Government imposed an additional newspaper tax of thee-halfpence circulation dropped.

To sell even so many copies in a town with a population of just 9,000 people would have been a remarkable achievement, but he did not: the sales came from further afield. His paper circulated throughout Lincolnshire, Lancashire, Yorkshire, London and Bristol. The Cambridge Intelligencer was read by Guardians in Manchester and Dissenters in Dorset. For Benjamin was a member of the Congregational church and used his columns to promote their cause. He also expressed his own opinions, producing editorials – something not seen before in a Cambridge newspaper – attacking the Government’s conduct of the war against Napoleon

and other contentious issues. He was ruffling a lot of feathers and annoying a lot of eminent people.

Then on Thursday 2nd May 1799 the establishment struck back.

It was six-thirty in the morning when his servant knocked at the bedroom door to tell him he had a visitor from London. It took a minute or two to complete his ablutions before Benjamin greeted Mr Finch, the Deputy Serjeant at Arms of the House of Lords. He carried with him a summons for Flower to present himself at the bar of the House next day to answer a charge of libel.

This shook Flower, but he had no option but to obey. He begged a short delay so that he could get to his newspaper office and make final arrangements for the publication of that week's issue. He also bade a fond farewell to his friends, for who knew when he might see them again.

At half-past-noon he set off with Finch in a post chaise; the official proved a most congenial travelling companion and not the insolent brutal thief-taker he had expected. They arrived at the house of a Sheriff's officer in Chancery Lane, London at nine that night. Benjamin slept well and woke refreshed, though his well-being vanished when he was presented with a bill for seven shillings and sixpence – a sum that did not even include breakfast! Nor was he the only lodger for he had five companions around the table, all of them confined for debt – and finding their pockets being emptied even more as a result.

Having a few hours before he was due to face his accusers Flower called in on a number of old friends seeking their advice on the line he should adopt. He even consulted an attorney but to no avail. Their Lordships had already concluded that a paragraph in the last week's paper had constituted 'a gross and scandalous libel' on the Bishop of Llandaff – Richard Watson, the absentee Regius Professor of Divinity at Cambridge University who spent all his time up in the Lake District. And if the House of Lords had already found him guilty, then there was no point in arguing the case. He had no option but to beg forgiveness.

At two in the afternoon Mr Finch escorted Flower to the House of Lords and handed him over to the custody of the Serjeant of Arms, William Watson. Benjamin thought his luck had changed – for Watson was a friend from a long way back. As a result the next couple of hours passed somewhat more pleasantly than they might have, not that he could really concentrate on polite discussion in view of what lay ahead.

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As editor of a Cambridge newspaper Benjamin Flower had been used to publishing the news of the day. And as that paper was the radical and nonconformist Cambridge Intelligencer, which circulated countrywide had far more readers outside the town than in it, he was used to making his own comments on that news. It was one of those editorials that resulted in his arrest on a charge of libel and taken to London to await his appearance before the House of Lords.

It was at four in the afternoon before he was finally ushered into their Lordship's presence. He was shown a copy of his paper of 20th April 1799 and asked whether he was the printer, had he ordered the offending paragraph to be inserted and had he written it? To each of these questions he answered in the affirmative

The statement related to the Professor of Divinity of Cambridge University, Richard Watson, Bishop of Llandaff – who everybody knew spent far more time in his Lake District farm than he ever did attending to these duties. Flower had described him as a 'humble retired

churchman' who having habitually attached the Government of Mr Pitt had then changed his mind and applied to him for some more important post than the mere Bishopric of an obscure part of Wales. 'The minister', Flower had added, 'has not yet thought the Right Reverent time-server and apostate worth paying and he remains in the church. The public will doubtless give him credit for his sentiments he deserves'.

This their Lordships had already judged to be libellous and Flower had been warned there was no appeal; all he could do was beg forgiveness. So he begged: "I am indeed sorry, that in the extreme hurry of business, in which as Editor, Printer, and Publisher of the paper I am necessarily engaged, the said paragraph should unfortunately have escaped me". It was absolutely impossible that he would intentionally have committee the high offence with which he was charged.
The he grovelled: "No one has borne a higher testimony than myself to the excellent writings and tracts of his Lordship … many of my doubts have been removed and my own faith has been confirmed …" Which was odd, seeing that Flower had been a committed nonconformist. He continued: "the superior theories of his Lordship's philosophy are the forgiveness of injuries and the love of enemies and it is surely impossible that he should entertain the lease desire for rigorous proceedings on the present occasion"

Few of their Lordships probably known anything of the Cambridge Intelligencer apart from the unfortunate paragraph which had drawn their displeasure, he continued, so he then read out extracts intended to prove him not to be the radical supporter of revolution that others had claimed.

He then turned to his own circumstances: "Totally unconnected with party, my sole dependence for support is on my daily labour. The paper which I have, amidst a variety of discouraging circumstances established, not withstanding the extent of its circulation, is yet, owning to the scarcity of advertisements, a source of very small emolument. Permit me to state that my income is only one hundred and forty pounds per annum. Trifling as this income may appear, I term it Independence, the quiet enjoyment of which is all I wish for, to carry me to my grave"

Now he was getting to the point: "My Lords, can circumstances as these bear a fine? Will not the very fees for attending this House bear hard upon me?" But there was something worse than a fine that he was fighting: "What must the be the effects of imprisonment, more especially if the place of imprisonment is fifty miles distance from my residence, and where my business is conducted? Can the ruinous aspect of my affairs afford any pleasure to your Lordships? – Impossible!"

It was time to sum up: "The very reflection of my having thus publicly incurred the displeasure of this House and the censure and reprimand of your Lordships – these to a man who has every been anxious to obey the laws of his country and show his perfect respect for every branch of the Legislature, must be a punishment sufficient surely to answer every purpose of justice and constitute a safeguard, a perfect security against a repetition of the offence, which, as it is the first, will most assuredly be the last. My Lords this day you have offered up your prayers for the 'forgiveness of trespasses, now I throw myself on your justice and clemency". And with that Flower withdrew to allow their deliberation and await his fate.

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Benjamin Flower left the chamber of the House of Lords to await the result of their Lordship's deliberation. As editor of the Cambridge Intelligencer he might have been rather too hasty in criticising the Bishop of Llandaff but surely his most grovelling apology would prove sufficient penance.

He faced of anxious waiting before he was informed of the motion that had been proposed, debated and carried: "That the Serjeant at Arms do convey the body of Benjamin Flower, Printer, to Newgate, to be kept in safe custody for the space of six months, and until he pay the fine of one hundred pounds"

This was a devastating judgement – not only a lengthy term of imprisonment but also a fine that represented two-thirds of his annual income. This was not all. On arrival at the gaol he was presented with a bill of £32 18s 8d to cover the Serjeant's fees including travelling expenses to and from Cambridge to collect him which at a shilling a mile amounted to £5 10s. This would have been even higher except for the fact that when on public business such officials were exempt from paying the turnpike fees. Flower paid up, but asked for a receipt – which cost him an additional fourpence

Then somebody told him he was entitled to a copy of the warrant that had committed him to gaol, so he demanded one to add to the file he was accumulating. He debated whether to quietly take his punishment or whether as he was being punished not as an individual but as the editor of a regional newspaper he ought to discharge his public duty and expose the unjustness of the proceedings. Indeed when another editor, that of the Morning Chronicle, had found himself in a similar situation Flower had questioned their Lordships' judgement. Perhaps they had read that editorial too and were now taking revenge? His duty was clear: he would appeal to the Court of King's Bench.

A month later in June 1799 his Counsel sought a writ of Habeas Corpus to permit Flower's release from Newgate to attend his appeal. He was told this was something that was not possible for his client was in contempt of the House of Lords for having libelled one of its members. But had he? Right at the start Benjamin had been advised that as he'd already been found guilty he had no option except to appeal for clemency. But now he intended to argue that he had never consciously published a libel and had never been tried nor lawfully convicted for so doing. Against all the precedents the keeper of Newgate Gaol was ordered to bring him back to Westminster.

Now the detailed appeal could commence with legal arguments as to whether the Lords had powers to imprison or fine a commoner for any offence committed outside the Palace of Westminster – surely that was something for the ordinary courts of law. Case after case was cited as precedent, with reference back to the Star Chamber.

Then it was the turn of Lord Kenyon to address the court. He turned to the original proceedings, reciting 'And the said Benjamin Flower having been heard as to what he had to say in answer to the said complaint' – he had been given the same means of defending himself as in a court of justice. He had chosen not to defend himself, now he had decided to question their Lordship's right to judge him. That was an attack on the constitution of the country itself and all such petty attacks would have no effect but only recoil upon those who made them.

But after all what had he actually done, this editor of a small obscure regional newspaper that only had a circulation of a few hundred copies? He had attacked a man who was both Regius Professor of Divinity at Cambridge University and Bishop of a Welsh Diocese but who spent most of his time as a Lake District farmer. Compare this with the scandal of the actress's skirt. After the Bishop of Durham had mentioned what he considered to be the indecent dress of the dancers at the opera the important, national, Morning Chronicle had commented that the Lords at last had a role – to discuss the length of a petticoat. After all they did nothing else except rubber-stamp the policies that Government Ministers dictated. For this gross attack the Chronicle's editor had been indicted, imprisoned and fined – but only for three months with a fifty-pound fine. How could it be right that Flower, who at the very worse he had libelled just

one man, should be facing double that punishment. Surely, concluded his Counsel, Flower should be discharged out of custody, or at least allowed bail.

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Benjamin Flower had been confident that the House of Lords would significantly reduce the sentence they had imposed for his libel of the Bishop of Llandaff. In this he was to be bitterly disappointed and he was sent back to his cell in Newgate to serve the rest of his six months imprisonment and somehow scrape together his £100 fine to say nothing of the other expenses he had incurred during his legal battles.

But at least as editor of the Cambridge Intelligencer – a paper that circulated throughout the length and breadth of the land - Flower could appeal for financial assistance from his dedicated readers. Funds came in, £90 from Liverpool where he knew not one individual but only £25 from Cambridge where he was well-known to all.

On his release Benjamin began to question whether it was really worth continuing his editorialising, especially given the possibility of further incarceration and fines; and anyway he had something else on his mind: marriage. But he picked up the reigns of his empire again, trying to be a little more careful about what he said, but failing to watch what he published.

For in April 1800, within a few months of his release, he was in trouble again and once more it was over a court case. William Fisher had been engaged in a dispute with the Rev William Wood, late Senior Bursar of St John's College and had twice obtained judgement over him. But when he saw the account of the proceedings in the Intelligencer he saw red and wrote to Flower to demand an apology.

But the editor was adamant that it was not his fault. He had not attended the court himself – he had doubtless seen enough of the law in action – but had printed a version of the proceedings from a gentleman of most respectable judgement and integrity – he would not say who. His correspondent could have course have been mistaken, nobody was infallible but he did not misrepresent the facts designedly. Anyway it was only a typographical error: he had only mixed up the words 'Defendant' and 'Plaintiff' – completely reversing the outcome of the action – but it was something he would correct in the next issue.

This was not sufficient for Fisher who felt that his name had been blackened not only in Cambridge but also across the kingdom from the Principality of Wales to the Hebrides. Flower had been neglecting his duties as editor by not checking the facts before he published them, he maintained. Benjamin was not going to be told his job: he would never be dictated to or influenced by any man of whatever importance they might imagine themselves. He was an editor, he would publish what he wanted, including Fisher's letter and his own defence.

From there matters escalated – how dare Flower publish private correspondence and if he was to going to use the columns of the Cambridge Intelligencer then Fisher would seek the assistance of a more reputable journal, the Cambridge Chronicle, to answer him. On and on the matter raged in the rival papers prompting even more debate about the accuracy of Flower's journal.

Within a month or so this crisis had blown over but Benjamin was becoming even more disillusioned. In 1803 he ceased publication and next year sold up his business and moved down to Harlow in Essex. He could not keep away from politics however and soon started a new publication entitled 'Flower's Political Review and Monthly Register' concentrating on the national and international issues and leaving Cambridge reporting to the old-established Cambridge Chronicle under the editorship of Francis Hodson.

Hodson had taken a gamble when he had chosen to start his paper in 1762 in a town which already had a 'Cambridge Journal and Weekly Flying Post', then published by Sarah James, widow of the founder. But within a year or two she was persuaded to retire through ill health and 'a valuable consideration' from the Chronicle's management. Now Hodson had the field to himself although the paper was something of a sideline for he was primarily a printer with his office on Market Hill. His four-page paper was filled with news snipped from National titles such as The Times together with the odd column or two of local happenings and University appointments. This was a most important area for him to cultivate for it was bound to attract advertisers anxious to promote their publications to the academic community.

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Elliott Smith was not a newspaperman but he was a man that newspaper editors sought to make friends with. For as an auctioneer he needed to advertise, and advertisers were the life-blood of newspapers. He had been befriended by James Hodson, printer and proprietor of the *Cambridge Chronicle* and discovered that it was no easy matter to publish a weekly journal.

First the news had to be gathered from various sources, and here the courts were particularly helpful as there was usually some interesting snippet of crime or scandal to fill an inch or two when advertisements were scarce. Then whatever had been trawled up had to be set up in type, which was a very time-consuming business. Hodson could save time by employing skilled compositors but such men did not come cheap in a place like Cambridge. Next the pages had to be printed and the presses on which the *Chronicle* relied were rudimentary wooden affairs. It took two men an hour to produce just two hundred single-sided sheets. These had to be allowed to dry before being replaced on the press to enable the other side to be done.

Once an edition was complete it had to be sold. There was always going to be a steady sale in Cambridge itself, at least during term time. But if Hodson was to keep the paper financially viable he had to sell copies in the surrounding area. Cambridge had a network of stagecoaches that could ensure relatively speedy distribution to neighbouring counties and each Friday night multiple copies the *Chronicle* were despatched by the Caxton Post up the Old North Road to York where they was forwarded to readers in Newcastle and Carlisle.

The problem of getting people to buy them had been made more difficult by the imposition of a newspaper tax, which pushed the prices up to a massive sevenpence a copy. But in 1836 the chancellor – one of Cambridge's own Members of Parliament, Spring Rice - had reduced the duty and the price for each issue of the paper dropped to fourpence-halfpenny per issue, or five shillings a quarter. At that price would every cottager soon be reading his own copy at his own fireside? Of course not – why buy something they could enjoy for free?

For the squire would pass his paper to the vicar, the vicar to his curate, the curate to the churchwarden, the warden to the shopkeeper, the shopkeeper to the barber and the barber would impart the news to those lesser mortals who could not actually read. Men would gather by the light of a candle to be regaled by stories of the goings-on around the world and the humble labourer would be read what Hodson had reprinted virtually word for word from *The Times* newspaper just a few weeks before. Such copying was quite normal and soon much of the local news the *Chronicle's* reporters collected was in turn being reprinted verbatim in a rival journal.

For a Huntingdon woman, Elizabeth Hatfield set up another paper in 1813 and her *Huntingdon, Bedford & Peterborough Gazette* began to eat into the *Chronicle's* sales. Worse was to follow for her 23-year-old son Weston Hatfield transferred its production to Cambridge in 1819 adding *Cambridge Independent Press* to its masthead. Hatfield built on the traditions of Benjamin Flower publishing editorials of political comment and appealing to

the nonconformist and liberal elements. Though his readership soared the problem of ensuring he actually receiving payment for copies sold proved difficult. By 1824 the paper was £1,500 in debt and bankruptcy was only averted after a number of Whig gentlemen advanced sums to keep it afloat and ensure themselves a medium through which they could voice their opinions.

Soon the Tories were in turn looking for a propagandist and if Hodson would not do it they would get somebody else. In 1825 they found a new champion in *The Huntingdon Bedford and Cambridge Weekly Journal* but it could never attract sufficient advertising and ceased publication within three years.

Then in 1837 Weston Hatfield editor of the *Independent* died and James Hodson proprietor of the *Chronicle* retired. His paper continued with the same team of editors and correspondents reflecting the old conservative principles, confident that with the continued support of the great majority of their educated and sound-hearted readers the *Cambridge Chronicle* would survive the attacks of a few self-interested Whig-Radical opponents. Time would tell.

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It soon became clear that whilst Elliott Smith the auctioneer appreciated Cambridge newspapers, John Bowtell the bookbinder did not. Indeed he refused ever to allow one into his house in All Saint's Passage for fear of further upsetting his wife, Matilda.

"My household, sir, is alive with children: we have John aged seven, William four, Charles who's now three and my wonderful new baby girl who we've named after her mother. We love children and hope to have more, but the actual childbirth is a particularly problematic time.

"My wife has in the past been well attended by that eminent surgeon, Dr Wray but now we are not sure whether we can trust him. You see a few months ago he was called in to attend to Amelia Barton but her newly born infant died soon after. The doctor was accused of unskilful treatment and indicted by the Coroner on a charge of manslaughter. He was committed to gaol to await trial but appealed that given his advanced age (he was 67) and his reputation - he'd been in practice for over 30 years – he should at least be able to await his hearing at home, and after thirteen weeks they let him out.

"His friends launched a subscription to pay for his defence pointing out that the woman had suffered an accident, which had brought on a miscarriage nine weeks before her time. The doctor had successfully delivered her of a son He had paid it every attention, secured the navel with a double ligature and ordered the nurse to sit be the fire with it, which she had. The baby had lived for four hours – without his skill it would not have survived for a quarter of an hour. They claim that Dr Wray has many enemies ever upon the alert for anything that will injure his reputation and they had used this incident to impugn his good name. Dr Wray is always ready to attend to the poor, without fee or reward but now nobody can really be sure they are safe in his hands. [Ch 10.6.1837]

"Now there's a report in the *Chronicle* of that shocking incident that has been the talk of Cambridge within the last week: the trail of an 18-year old girl, Mary. She was a servant at Mr Ladd's farm at Trumpington along with Sarah Cross, with whom she shared a room. One morning last March she complained of feeling ill; her mistress gave her some gin and water and they decided she ought to go and stay with father at Litlington for a few days until she felt better. That was the last time anybody at Trumpington saw Mary. Sarah Rayner called in to do her work and noticed when she went to bed that the sheets were discoloured – she wondered then if there'd been a miscarriage.

“A few week’s later Mary got a new position in service at a house in Nethold, Bedfordshire. Pheobe Hyde, another servant, noticed that she brought two boxes with her and that something smelled very strong. So she started to unpack and discovered the body of a child in a state of decomposition. Of course Pheobe informed her mistress and they called for a surgeon to examine Mary. She confessed that she had been delivered of a son at Trumpington but claimed it had been born quiet.

“But when it came to court her lawyer argued that she’d done anything wrong; there was no evidence that Mary had intended to dispose of the body illegally; she had just put it in a box. The judge told the jury they must be certain that she did intend to dispose of it when an opportunity presented itself. They came to a verdict of guilty of the concealment of a birth with an intention to bury the body and she’s been sentenced to eight month’s imprisonment. [Ch 4.8.1838]

“Now you may say that this is local news and ought to be reported in a local newspaper. But should a Cambridge newspaper report sensational stories from far away, like that horrific incident in Ireland. It does nobody any good and causes needless alarm”, opined Bowtell. Not so, argued Smith, in a place like Cambridge with so much medical research it was important that such matters be made public.

Pickwick settled more comfortably into his pew as the incident was related in all its horrendous detail.

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The article which had divided Smith and Bowtell reported an extraordinary trial in County Cork. It involved Honora McCarthy and an eight-year-old boy named William Crolly who she’d tried to sell for dissection.

The Cambridge Chronicle told how John Lefebure, an apothecary in Dunmanway, testified that Honora, a woman he had never seen before, had come to his shop between six and seven one evening and asked to see him. He took her through into a room at the back and she told him she had a child to sell. She was perfectly sober.

After he’d recovered from the shock John had asked her what she thought he wanted of the child. She replied “Oh, the likes of you always want them”. He asked her if the lad was her own child and she said she took him to keep him for charity. When questioned as to whether she had the right to sell him Honora had replied “No one had a better – he was a bad boy and joined against her in bad words.”

When asked how much she wanted she asked for £5. He’d told her that was too much – grown subjects were got for £2. “Oh”, she’d replied, “those who sell the like told me that was very cheap”. At that he’d offered her £3, then £3.10s and then £4 but she’d refused. So he’d finally agreed to pay the asking price. This was agreed provided she could have a long day after the boy was handed over so she could leave the town and the country

She said she would send the boy to walk up and down before his door that night and he would have on corduroy breeches with two blue patches on the front, and a leather cap. Later he’d looked out of his window and seen the lad walking about, as promised

John had asked her to bring the child at nine o’clock as the town would be quieter and the people not going to mass. But this was too early for her: she would bring him about ten and would knock the senses out of him, for he was a cunning chap, and would not go near a doctor’s shop. When asked how she would do that and she replied “by giving him porter and

a glass". She would sit exactly opposite his house and would come over when he beckoned her.

Next morning as he was sitting at breakfast he saw Honora walking up and down with the lad. He'd beckoned to her and she went away evidently to give the boy some porter and whisky, for when she returned the child was quite drunk. She came across to the house, saying to the boy "Come in, I want to light my pipe". He'd asked her again why she wanted to sell him and he made the same answer as before. He told her he thought the lad was eleven, "Oh", she replied "he is the better for that."

At that he'd agreed to take the lad and the boy began to cry, saying "Anty, let me out and God knows I'll come in again". "Whisht, a lee", said she "and the doctor will give you something sweet" She asked him to give the lad something to put him aside at once, as she should be going to the road. He asked her whether she could have another boy for him in a month, and she thought she could. He then told her to wait while he went for the money.

There was one thing Honora did not know: on the previous night the apothecary had asked Armstrong, the constable, to be in attendance and had hidden him in a pantry between the shop and the kitchen. Now he let the policeman in who at once arrested the woman.

In court her defence lawyer offered a plea of insanity but the Matron of the jail said Honora had been four months under her charge and she considered her to be perfectly sensible, she knew the difference between right and wrong. At that the jury returned a verdict of Guilty. The judge told the prisoner: "You have been convicted of a crime for which your life is to pay the forfeit. You had a young and tender youth in your charge; how you behaved towards him we do not know but it is a favourable circumstance that you supported him through charity. It remains for me to record a sentence of death against you". As for the lad he would make an order for his support and have him sent to school.

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Getting a good education was an important issue for John Bowtell whose eldest son was now seven. The obvious place for him to obtain that education should have been the Perse School, but the scandals that had revolved around that institution had left a sour taste in his mouth, as he related.

Dr Stephen Perse was for forty years or more a fellow of Caius College; he started studying divinity but then changed tack and studied medicine, only to switch back to divinity, then back to medicine. He became the best-known and respected a physician in Cambridge. He also speculated in property and money-lending. He sought a fair return on his investments trying to help tradespeople and others in temporary financial difficulty. It backfired when he found himself in court after two Haddenham men complained that he had demanded from them twice the original loan. They expressed surprise and that 'being a learned man and a doctor skilful in the care of diseased bodies, should be so far forgetful of his own soul as upon his oath he brought forth and vomited such viperous and scandalous charges'. The charge was dismissed.

Perse became a wealthy man and he died worth upwards of £10,000 – an enormous sum in 1615. He wanted his fortune to be used for charitable purposes so he set up a Trust to try and bring Town and Gown together. His money established almshouses for single or unmarried people, helped the poor in various villages and assisted the University Library. It also went towards making a new road out to Barnwell – the Maids' Causeway - towards the scheme for bringing water from Nine Wells – the Hobson's Conduit – and to his old college, Caius where he funded a new front court which was named after him.

He left other money to Caius, granting the Master £3, the senior fellows thirty shillings and various other Perse Fellows, lecturers and scholars smaller sums each year. There was money for the important people too – the cook, butler, taster and porter who got one pound each, and the under-cook ten shillings.

A body of trustees was established who invested the money in buying more estates. The investment proved successful and the sum has increased eight times. But some of the outgoings rose even more: by 1829 instead of getting £128 from his charity, Caius College was taking over £1,600! Perse had left nothing for college repairs or new buildings, but they spend £800 out of his trust funds anyway.

Even Dr Perse's endowments could not be stretched indefinitely so to economise the trustees cut back on some of the charities he'd nominated. All this was easily covered up since although accounts should have been presented each year to the Vice-Chancellor for auditing this had never been done in living memory. One year the Bursar made a mistake of £100 – in his own favour – when adding up the accounts – but nobody noticed.

But some people did notice that expenditure on the master and four senior fellows of Caius College had increased and that the college dean, steward, registrar and gardener were also getting a share. Two of the Fellows of Caius who were entitled to money from the Trust complained that their stipends were still at the 1615 level whereas those of Master and Senior Fellows had increased from £9 to £840 per annum. It so alarmed one of the senior members of College, Mr Bickersteth a barrister, that when he found out he refunded nearly £800 and resigned his fellowship. But none of the other dons followed suit.

Then a chap calling himself Launcelot Probe issued a little pamphlet asking what was going on. It was a question that would not go away and last year matters were aired in court. The Master of Caius admitted there had been irregularities but claimed they had not intended to defraud, they had just forgotten what the will said. The judge said he could not order them to repay the money since the current dons were only doing what previous generations had done – and their predecessors were dead and not able to be in court. But some people question that ruling and point out that the judge himself was a member of Gonville and Caius College – that same Mr Bickersteth who had previously shared in the proceeds but returned them when the scandal broke.

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Most Cambridge people knew little about where Dr Stephen Perse's money had gone, but many remembered that much of it should have gone to maintain his school, a school that others had forgotten even existed.

Yet the judge at the inquiry in 1837 was adamant that this had been Perse's main concern. Under his will of 1615 he had directed that a Free School should be built on a piece of land in St Edward's Parish. It should be open to five-score scholars born in Cambridge, Barnwell, Chesterton and Trumpington and no more who should be taught freely all the usual subjects expected at a Grammar School. Those lads with ability had the opportunity to go on to Gonville & Caius College as a Perse Scholar and be eligible for a Perse Fellowship

Martin Perse a relation, took matters in hand, within three years the new school was finished. It stood in Luthburne Lane, now renamed Free School Lane in its honour. It comprised a large schoolroom and two houses for the staff.

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Perse's will directed that there should be a Master to do the teaching and an Usher to maintain the registers. Both were to be men of some academic ability. They were to be paid a salary sufficient to ensure that they would have no other employment nor hold any other position: they could concentrate solely on the boys in their care.

Any Cambridge lad was eligible for admission and if there were two or more candidates for a single vacancy it was the poorer man's child to be preferred. But the rules were soon changed to enable any man to send his son there, no matter where he lived, provided he paid fees to attend the 'Free School'. This money went to supplement the teacher's salary

The first Master was Thomas Lovering, former head of King's College School. Pupils flocked in and the registers soon contained the names of Roger and John Pepys, cousins of Samuel the diarist. They like other lads had to be at their place by six o'clock in the morning to start the day with prayers. The curriculum included good manners as well as the study of Latin, though not Greek or mathematics

As the school's reputation soared and lads were withdrawn from Eton to be sent to Cambridge so the reputation of Lovering rose too. He left to become Master of Norwich Grammar School. It marked a period of decline for Perse's school. The Fellows of Caius College appointed their Dean in direct violation of the rule that the Master should devote all his time to the school. The quality of teaching dropped and parents withdrew their sons. Numbers immediately shot up again when he was replaced by Thomas Crabbe, a Perse old boy, with another ex-scholar as Usher.

The Civil War and plague hit the school badly. Few men were prepared to pay to send their sons as boarders and the number of free scholars also plummeted. As Parliamentary Cambridge prepared to withstand Royalist siege the roof and chimneys of the school were badly damaged by a storm; repairs ate up even more of their income. Owing to the unsettled state of the country the Trustees found it difficult to collect rents from their lands in Essex and the salaries of the teachers were cut by half. Somehow they struggled through the crisis. But then another loomed from within Caius.

The College Master was accused of being a Royalist supporter and turned out from his position. His replacement was William Dell who had been chaplain to Cromwell's New Model Army. He had his own views of education. Pupils should be taught to read their own native tongue but Greek and Hebrew should be added to Latin so that they could better understand the Old Testament; Ovid, Virgil and the other previously essential texts were to be abandoned. It was too much for Thomas Crabbe who resigned his post as Master.

It would be months before a replacement could be appointed so in the meantime the Usher, Robert Crayford was asked to stand in. He had proved himself a loyal servant to the school during its difficult period and many considered him the ideal candidate as Master. It was not to be and the scene was set for one of the most distressing period in the school's history.

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When George Griffiths, a Puritan, was appointed to be Master of the Perse School in 1652 in preference to the Usher, Robert Crayford, war broke out. The two men did not get on and their squabbles were soon the gossip of the town.

Notes in Bowtell's papers recorded: "Before all ye schollers Crayford in a most violent manner made an assault upon George Griffith and said scandalous, opprobrious and reproachful words to wit 'you are a strikinge knave; you come to steale away my due; I will take you a kicke on the britch and tred in your feete'."

Things got even more serious as the Usher turned his frustrations on the boys: “He wrung Thomas Peters by both his eares in yat violent manner that one of his eares was cruelly torne both skinn and grissle and almost went from his head” Worse was to follow. “He did in unmercifull and cruell manner whip one John Spratford yat his body was sor gashed and torne by his cruell stripes that he could scarce indure to lay himselfe downe in his bed and night”. Spratford’s father withdrew the lad from the school.

It seemed to Pickwick that this was even worse than the behaviour recorded by Nicholas Nickleby at ‘Dotheboys Hall’; yet there was even more. “He did smite one Edward Webb in a most violent manner upon his jawes and beat hym downe with his head against a wooden forme. Webb riseing upp again, Crayford smote him ye second tyme in like manner in soe much yat his head and jawes were soe bruised he was in very great danger of death”. His father, a surgeon, nursed his son back to health but he never returned to school.

The Trustees dispensed with Crayford’s services, but he refused to get out of his school house and appealed against his sacking, claiming he had behaved quietly, soberly and honestly. The legal wrangling dragged on for two years, further denuding the Trust’s funds. Eventually the lawsuit was abandoned and a compromise reached; Crayford was allowed to stay on in his house for another year provided he stopped insulting the Master.

But the damage had been done; more townsfolk boycotted the school. It was not until Dell was replaced as Master of Caius that things settled down and Griffiths was able to restore the school’s reputation. Soon members of the landed gentry such as the Russells from Chippenham and the Hares from Stow Bardolph were sending their sons to his school. But while numbers increased the finances did not and once more the salaries were cut. This did not bother Griffiths; he had a private income and a passion for the job. He served the school for nearly 35 years and died much loved and respected, leaving the institution in good shape. He even willed £100 to supplement the revenue of the School.

People were shocked when even before Griffiths had been laid in his grave the Trustees announced his successor. They chose Edward Sparkes who had served as Usher for several years. He had little ambition, being content to muddle along doing as little as he could in return for whatever salary they could pay him. His Ushers were even less committed; one left to set up his own school, taking a number of pupils with him until finally the Trustees found the ideal candidate, Sparkes’ own son, and the school stagnated further.

By the time Sparkes died, aged 73, the situation was dire; soon the school which had been planned for 100 pupils only attracted ten. This was far too few for the magnificent building it occupied - except that it didn’t: the school was rented out as an organ-builders workshop and what few pupils attended were taught in the Master’s house. Eventually even this was rented out and found a tenant in the person of the disreputable Jemmy Gordon whose exploits Pickwick has recorded earlier in his journals.

As years passed few residents remembered that there was a free school for their children and with the town council in turmoil nobody seemed to care. It was then that the Cambridge Chronicle carried a letter which was to change the course of history

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The Perse School could have faded into history except for an anonymous letter that appeared in the Cambridge Chronicle of 20th October 1787. “Sir”, it read, “I should esteem it a favour if some of your correspondents would inform me, whether our Free Grammar School has an endowment, and to what amount? Who is the Master, and by whom appointed? Whose

children are entitled to admission at the school, and to whom should application be made for such admission?"

The enquiry prompted an immediate from the Perse Trustees: The school had been kept open as long as any boys were sent for education. The masters are now and always have been ready to admit scholars and parents have only themselves to blame if they do not reap the advantages of that foundation.

Now others joined in, including one of the boys who had been educated there: It was not the parents who were to blame but the teachers. Dr Perse had ordered that the Master and his assistant should attend whenever the school was open. But the boys arrived hours before the Master ever turned up and when he did come he only stayed a short time. No wonder numbers dropped until there were so few boys that he stopped bothering to come in at all, just leaving a message that any pupils who did show up should come to his rooms at Caius College. But surely the Masters who were being paid their salary should fulfil the will of the donor even if there was only one pupil?

This shamed the Trustees into action and the school reopened in January 1788. It had a new Master, Charles Davy and a new Usher, Robert Forby, though he was more interested in compiling a dictionary of East Anglian dialect words. Others followed but without a decent salary nobody was going to stay long. By 1809 the New Cambridge Guide spoke of only two or three scholars on the books and continued: "This is the more to be regretted, as the children, generally speaking, of the poor inhabitants of Cambridge are rude and uninformed"

Something had to be done; trustees realised that if they wanted a good Master they must pay a realistic salary; so they more than doubled his stipend to £120. But that money had to come from somewhere so they abolished the position of Usher. They also reduced the number of free scholars from 100 down to just 16 and advertised for fee-paying pupils at a guinea entrance fee and a guinea a term. Even this would not cover all the costs so there was an extra charge of a half-crown a year for candles and firing.

Any hope that this would revive the school's fortune were soon dashed; the one benefit of Perse's school had been that it was free and there were several other schools in Cambridge which offered a much better education at that price. Anyway how could one Master cope with more than a handful of pupils, even if he was a good teacher – and the present one wasn't. Nobody was prepared to pay and the school bumbled along with no more than 20 lads.

It was plainly nonsense to have so few pupils in so big a schoolroom. For one thing it was too cold to study in and for another thing there was a better option. The University had just received a large number of paintings from Viscount Fitzwilliam and needed somewhere to display them. If the trustees pushed the pupils into a side room they could rent the schoolroom as a temporary Museum. So that is what they did. The fine old building was hacked about, windows blocked in, skylights put in the roof and pictures displayed where generations of Cambridge lads had received an education.

But as soon as the school had lost its principal classroom there came a new Master with vision, James Bailey, who expanded the syllabus and boosted the number of pupils. As numbers increased he needed another teacher and paid for him out of his own salary. But although he taught arithmetic Bailey could not add up and found himself frequently in debt, having to beg and borrow to keep himself out of the bankruptcy courts. He nearly worried himself to death during the big enquiry into the Perse Trust and though was acquitted of any involvement in the mismanagement he chose to resign his position. So once more there was change and it was too soon to see how the new man would settle in, leaving Bowtell to ponder just where to send his own sons for their education.

The prospects of slaving away for years at some school, being half-taught half the time by some master or usher who would prefer to be doing something else was not one which appealed to many boys.

For you didn't need an education to wander the countryside and admire the flowers, day in day out, year after year; nor to earn a crust by selling poetry to people with as little learning as oneself. Or at least that was the experience of James Chambers whose little volume of poetry had recently found its way into the University Library where it had come under Bowtell's eye; he had taken upon himself to research the story of the beggar-poet

James' father was a leather-seller in Soham, earning a fair living by hawking his wares around the surrounding villages. He discovered that having a young handsome boy as his companion was no bad way of winning the support of the ladies of the grand houses he visited. And James quickly discovered that he had an eye for detail, and an ability to earn an extra farthing by composing verses.

THE TOWN OF SOHAM, CAMBRIDGESHIRE.

One of the first had been recited on a visit to Wicken Hall:
"Your church and your steeple I didn't much admire,
Because I was certain our own was much higher"

And this had enchanted the owner, as he recorded:
"You received me as well as e'er I could desire,
With the Miss's company and a good fire;
You gave me plum-pudding, which pleased me well,
And other good food, that I might have my fill"

It was an idyllic childhood, little spoilt by education - he went one day, didn't like it and never went again. But then things went wrong; the business failed and his mother left; his dad married a second time and James never got on with the replacement.

By now he believed he had the knack of selling so he left home to earn a living as a pedlar only to find that country housewives wanted little to do with an increasingly scruffy and smelly urchin hawking increasingly tattered goods. To increase his income he took to making nets; it was something he was good at. Sadly he was no good at actually selling them, they got snagged and torn on roadside bushes and were soon so rotten that they were useless for trapping the rabbits he increasingly depended on for food.

James could always fall back on his verses and earn a few pence by selling his rhymes; sadly he had never learned to write properly and as nobody could read his manuscripts he was forced to get them printed first. However as he plodded from place to place so country folk, who could not actually read his words, welcomed one they regarded as a great poet. He responded by composing something just for them and stayed, enjoying their hospitality, until his hosts had learned the words by heart. And each night he found shelter in barn or hayloft he awoke refreshed with new verses running through his brain, verses that he had to set down and teach to his current benefactor before he left.

But it was not just one mouth his host found they had to feed, for James came complete with an increasing number of dogs; it was not long before his welcome became strained and it was time to move on.

He found a particular welcome in the neighbourhood of Haverhill where he became such a celebrity that he was himself immortalised in verse by another poet, John Webb.

Near yonder bridge, that strides the rippling brook,
A hut once stood, in small sequester'd nook,
Where Chambers lodg'd : though not of gipsy race,
Yet, like that tribe, he often chang'd his place.
A lonely wand'rer he, whose squalid form
Bore the rude peltings of the wintry storm.

It seemed as if he was set up for a very long stay; he had a patron, he was settled, he was appreciated – but he was a traveller with an urge to move on; and move on he did

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James Chambers the Soham peddler-poet dressed in rags, a tattered soldier's jacket, breeches too short and unbuckled at the knees, a run-down shoe on one foot. He described himself in his principal poem: The Poor Poetaster:

My stockings are torn as I walk in the dirt,
And some months I've existed without any shirt.
My feet they go wet, and my neck takes much cold,
And rustics despise me 'cause mean and old;

Barns were his favourite sleeping places but ones he enjoyed rarely, for farmers were disinclined to let him stay there for fear he would contaminate the other animals. So he slept in sheds, pigsties, in the open fields, under hedges or in the shelter of haystacks, whatever the weather:

Into a cold pigsty I sometimes did creep,
Undress'd me, and there on the damp floor did sleep
Stones came in the day, and snow in the night,
Which hurt me and chilled me, forbidding delight,

He would often wake in the morning covered with snow that had been driven through the crevices of the shed within which he had been sleeping, his limb so numbed that he could not feel them. Though many people took pity on the poor poet, others did not:

From place then to place I was harassed about,
Ston'd, robb'd and insulted by every base lout;
While I was at Church, they play'd a sad joke,
They stole all my nets, and my pitcher they broke;

Again in the hog's cote I slept among strife,
Was mobbed out of town, and escaped for my life;
In barns I'm surrounded too oft by the mob,
And slyly they enter, they spoil and they rob.

James preferred the quiet way of life, avoiding the excitements that occasionally enlivened the daily drudgery of ordinary folk:

To visit Fairs I'm not inclined,
The noise and bustle hurt my mind,
I feel no real pure delight
To riot to excess all night.
It me enerves, it gives me cold,
'Tis neither good for young nor old;
Should heaven a peaceful home provide,
I'd there repose at Whitsuntide.

At last his luck changed; he was befriended by a Suffolk gentleman who took him to his mansion. There he was cleaned and clothed and introduced into polite society. The Duchess of Chandos, the Countess of Dysart and Lord Henniker were amongst those who subscribed a few shillings to tame this wandering spirit. A cottage was hired for him, furniture procured and a printer commissioned to ensure that his poetic musings were published to provide him a steady source of income. But within a few weeks the wanderlust returned and he walked away from comfort and took once more to the bushes and tumbled-down shacks of the countryside. Once more he was dependent on charity for his living, once more he scrawled down verses often in the form of acrostics based on the names of his latest benefactor or himself:

James Chambers is my name
And I am scorned by rich and poor;
Many a weary step I came,
Enduring hardships very sore;
So I design to take a wife.

Can I but have one to my mind
Henceforth to live a better life,
And then we may true solace find;
May I but have the lass I love,
Both to each other constant prove,
Endeavour thus to live in peace
Renewing love in every case
So to remain till life does cease.

But woman's love was never to come his way.

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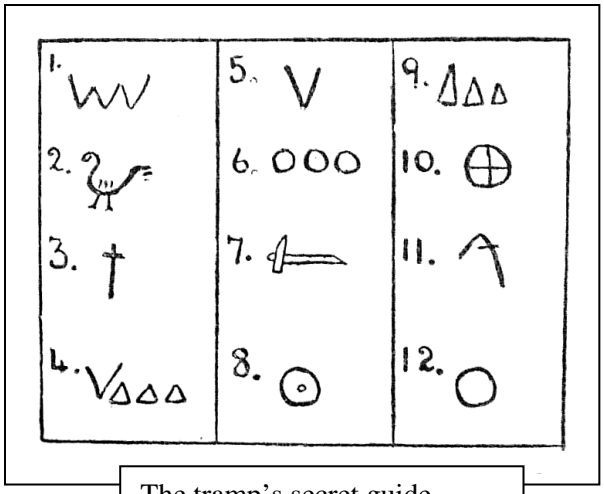
James Chambers the Soham poet-peddler never married, any affection that he felt was devoted to his dogs, an-ever-increasing pack of which roamed and snapped around his feet. Sometimes that love was sorely tested as on one occasion when a kind lady gave him a piece of pork and a mug of her good home-brewed beer. As he sat down to enjoy it he chanced upon another traveller and soon the two were exchanging reminiscences and tips as to which houses in the locality would respond best to a visit from a travelling poet.

But then his companion warned 'Jimmy, you'll have nothing to eat, a little black dog has run away with your meat'. He then roared with laughter at the sight of man and dog snapping and snarling over the same piece of pig before the animal that was the dog ran off in triumph and the animal that was the poet returned crestfallen, but with another idea to turn into verse

"In the Summer one thousand eight hundred and eight,
I travers'd gay fields, but had no foot to eat.
And having no cash, no provision could buy
Sure ne'er was so poor bard as distressed as I

Once near the Buck's Horns I was robbed of my meat
Deprived of my supper, severe was my fate."



The tramp's secret guide

But from his companion he learned the secret of the symbols chalked to a wall or doorstep – the signs for 'savage dog', 'kind-hearted woman', 'pretend to be ill' and the rest that guided such travellers to potential benefactors.

James Chambers was not to be master of his own fate for ever; he moved on to Ipswich – which he found unfriendly, then to Framlingham and Woodbridge where he made his home in a hut near the old barracks,a place extremely squalid and decayed. Here he attracted the attention of some of the local gentry who decided that something must be done. Not for them the option of kindliness, this time it was threat – unless he tidied himself up he would be sent home to Soham – and the workhouse.

This was not a prospect he could face, for it was a place he had been before. He consented to being cleaned up; his hovel was emptied, his few possessions – 'rubbish' to his benefactor-tormentors burned and he was put in a new room, clean and well-clothed. A bedstead and bedding were provided together with a table and a chair; people clubbed together to raise a few shillings so he could live decently. It was, he confessed, the worst day's work of his life! After a few weeks he was off again and was soon as dirty and disreputable as before.

Once more however fortune favoured him; once more he found a benefactor, this one at Stradbroke, where he was given two rooms to rest in from the cold. Two ladies adopted him, providing him with warm blankets and gruel, but it was too late. He died in the January of 1827 leaving behind him tenpence-halfpenny and a few scraps of poetry. There was not enough for a coffin, so the villagers provided one and he was laid, finally at rest in the churchyard.

At least he had been spared what he most dreaded – a return to the Soham workhouse.

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James Chambers the travelling poet was terrified at the prospect of being returned back to his home village of Soham and the workhouse. He confided his fears in his most famous poem 'The Poor Poetatster', capturing in verse some of the beatings and mistreatment he claimed to have witnessed in that institution.

If Providence kind, recent friends does not raise,
I in a dread workhouse must finish my days.
Must cease turning verses, and noding choice twine
While some fellow-mortals in these branches shine.

Noding twine was making nets, one of the skills that Chambers possessed, though sadly he had never actually got around to selling them. There were benefits:

'Tis true workhouse rulers plain viands prepare
And paupers industrious in wholesome food share,
A hot dinner three times a week they provide,
Good pudding and meat, and some butter beside.

Each one that's mature has a pint of small beer,
Of ale each a pint, three or four times a year;
Half a bed on a garret, with covering warm,
Would there be my lot to defend me from harm.

Regular food would surely outweigh the uncertainty of poaching a hare and any ale would be better than the water obtained from wayside ponds or pumps. But there was a downside: workhouse inmates had to work, and that was something Chambers did not fancy. But it was the beatings and bullying that concerned him most of all:

By day must I dwell where there's many a wheel,
And a female is employ'd to sit down and reel,
A post with two ringles is fix'd in the wall,
Where orphans when lash'd, loud for mercy do call;

Depriv'd of fresh air, I must there commence spinner,
If I fail of my task, I lose a hot dinner;
Perhaps at the whipping-post then shall be flogg'd,
And lest I escape my leg must be clogg'd.

While tyrants oppress I must still be their slave,
And cruelly used, tho' well I behave;
'Midst swearing and brawling, my days I must spend,
In sorrow and anguish my life I must end.

His previous experiences had certainly scarred him:

Of this cruelty I've had experience before,
And wish, their keen lash to come under no more;
The young they encourag'd the old to abuse.
They both youth and age do inhumanly use,

Friendless orphans they beat, while for mercy they cry'd
The blood it gush'd forth – they in agony dy'd,
Dropp'd down on the floor, no more did they rise,
Which struck timid minds with a sudden surprise;

I too was abused, 'twill again be the case,
If a great happy change has not taken place:
For a number of years I have verses compos'd,
In hopes to find solace, ere life shall be clos'd.

A baleful requital for all labours past
'Twill be, if in prison I breathe out my last.

But what were conditions in Soham workhouse really like at the time Chambers had been there? Pickwick enquired. Elliott Smith had the answer. It was one of the largest in the county with about sixty residents housed in a wooden two-storied thatched building. And yes, the overseer did make them work, mainly at spinning in long low buildings in the yard. But any money they made – anything from £4 to £17 didn't meet a quarter of the costs of the upkeep of the workhouse.

They parish had to pay out for flour, beef and pork for the inmates, then there was the cost of turf from the fen for fuel. The paupers had to be clothed with shoes, breeches and gowns always being needed; they got ill and had to be supplied with medicines and when they finally

died then somebody had to pay for the coffin and burial. It had been calculated that every person in the workhouse was costing the parish six shillings a week. No wonder the overseers tried to cut costs and bring in much money as possible.

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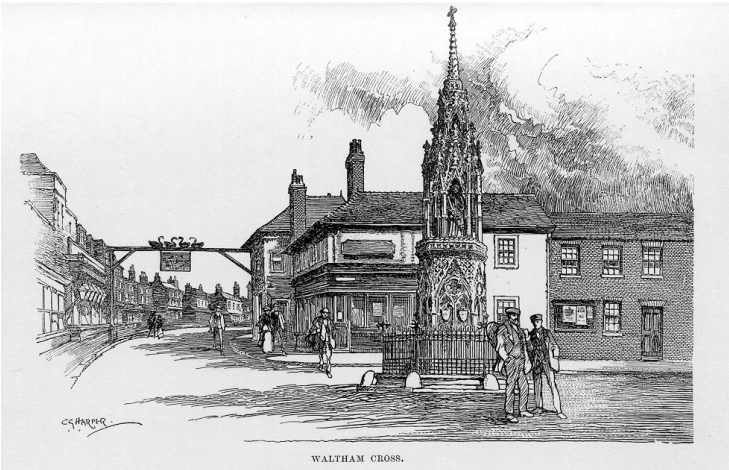
Many people thought arranged marriages were a good solution to the problems of illegitimate children. About ten years before there were 27 bastard children in the care of the Soham overseers with an extra one coming in every year. Now there were 31. About one third were living with their mothers out in the village, the rest were lodged in the workhouse.

Wherever they were, once an illegitimate child was born the parish was responsible for its maintenance to the tune of between one-and-six and seven shillings every week. So the overseers tried to get rid of a pregnant woman out of their parish into somebody else's before she actually had the baby or get her married off. Whatever if it cost it would be less than having to support the brat for life.

At Meldreth the parish officers set out in pursuit of a noted fornicator who had fled the village leaving another souvenir of his activity. Finally they tracked him down and, without revealing their true purpose, struck up a friendship. After several jugs of ale they were all bosom pals – until the man was too drunk to realise what was happening. He awoke to find himself incarcerated in the lock-up at Kneesworth where he was given a proper wash and brush-up before being conveyed back to Meldreth. On arrival he found the Vicar complete with marriage licence in one hand and the intended bride in the other. They gave him the option: he could go to church or go to gaol. The man chose matrimony and later that day left the parish with his new wife. It had cost the churchwardens in expenses £2 13s.8d. but saved the parish a packet.

Sometimes it was not that simple. Sarah Gear was a Royston girl of somewhat easy virtue. She fell for the charms of Thomas Fagg, a wealthy publican from Holborn and once her condition became apparent the wardens set off to London to encourage him into matrimony. Instead he agreed to pay five shillings a week maintenance, provided Sarah look after the child herself.



WALTHAM CROSS.

But shortly afterwards Sarah was pregnant again. This time she would not divulge the name of the father so the officials considered several possible candidates before eventually settling on Henry Gayford, an inn-keeper from Waltham. He was offered a bribe to accept responsibility and take Sarah to live with him; he agreed, Sarah did not mind provided they pay her stagecoach fare and fit her up with some decent dresses. But two years later she was back again, this time with another kid – Henry had had enough and slipped away in the night.

Then an eligible Barkway bachelor who had come to Royston to seek his fortune fell for her charms. The overseers encouraged his attentions and even found him a job so he had money to spend. He duly succeeded in his courtship but this time the officials were taking no chance. They paid the marriage fees and for the wedding ring; they were witnesses at the ceremony and next morning issued a warrant for the happy couple to get out of town and back to the

husband's village of Barkway. Once more love did not run smooth: within a year Sarah was back again – her lawful husband had run off leaving her with another child. But this time the child had been born at Barkway and it was that parish who now had to support her and her brood.

If the man wouldn't marry the officials had another solution: if they could prove who the father was they could seize his possessions. All it took was for the woman to name a man she said was responsible, they could then get him arrested and flung in gaol unless he agreed to pay towards the child. But of course a woman could say anything and sometimes accused two different men, especially after the rules changed. Previously there was a fixed charge on the father of two shillings a week whatever his circumstances. But then courts started to vary it depending on the man's status. One Harston mother got twice the normal payment from a prosperous merchant.

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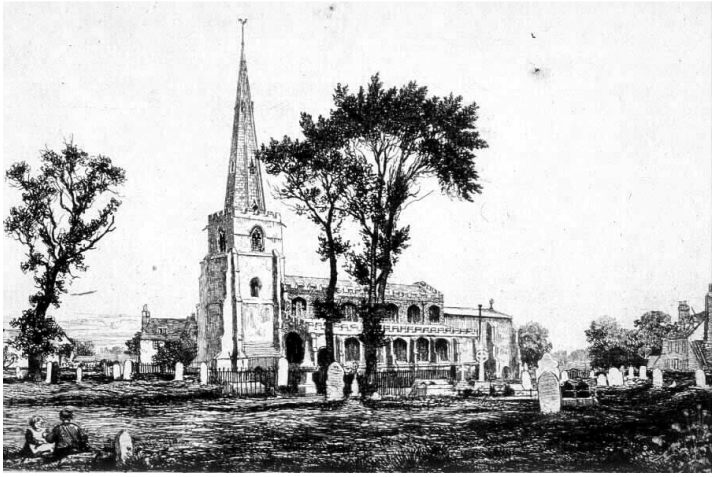
Once a girl discovered she was in the family way the rush was on to find somebody to take responsibility for mother and child and thus relieve the parish of that expense, as John Bowtell, overseer of All Saints' church, had explained earlier. But it was not always that simple.

"The problem is that the whole procedure is time-consuming: first the overseers have to track the man down and demand payment. If he refuses to pay a summons has to be taken out before a magistrate will issue a warrant for his arrest. But as soon as this process starts then the man just takes off somewhere else. The parish has to decide whether to go to all the expense of tracking him down.

"If we do find him and take him to court he'd elect to go to gaol rather than pay up – thus adding the parish's legal costs to the cost of maintaining the child anyway. Sometimes its better to cut our losses and take some payment – anything we can get –to close the matter.



"Of course we have to be careful what happens to the money: there was that case at Chesterton where the overseers took a lump sum to hush things up but the mother went to court complaining she never saw any of the cash. That had got stuck in the bottom of the overseer's pocket, if you know what I mean.

"Some say that there should be a county asylum for mothers and their bastards where we could as give the mothers some religious instruction, educate the children and teach them some useful employment as well. Then in due course put them on a boat to Australia and get them to emigrate. But others come up with a better solution: put the whole expense on the mother. They say that if a woman knew there would be no provision for the child then there would be far fewer illegitimate children!

“But there is another side – these fertile women are seen as a great advantage by some of the more canny of the workshy men. You see a man earning average wages is expected to be able to maintain his wife and three or four children. That’s as it should be. But once he has any more than four children he can claim an allowance from the parish to bring his guaranteed income up to fourteen shillings a week.

“So you get the situation where one man and his family have been labouring all week to earn twelve bob. On Saturday he goes to the overseer and claims an extra two shillings. Alongside him in the queue is another man who is supposed to have been working all week on the roads with 10 or 20 other men. But everybody knows that there is no supervision and he has in reality been spending the week in total idleness, loitering away a great part of his time at the alehouse. He laughs at his more industrious neighbour for being weak enough to work, when he can receive the same pay for doing nothing.

“Its worse when you remember that the earnings of the wife and family are lumped together with the father – so why should they bother to go out to work at all! It’s more cost effective to breed more and more children. Often we find that men who when single were industrious hardworking labourers, completely changed their character, and have become indolent bad workmen, once their family had hit that magic total where the parish allowance brings in more than they could earn in full work.

“Now if a man can find a fertile woman with a large brood to start with then he’s halfway there. A life of idleness and boozing lies ahead of him just for the sake of a church marriage and a little bit of the sort of work that a man is happy to indulge in, especially when drunk enough not to care what she looks like!”

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There was another reason for taking on somebody else’s children, as Bowtell explained: “A single man cannot get work so long as there is a married man with a family who is unemployed. So there’s a great incentive for a labouring man to get married as soon as he can, even if he cannot afford to support a family. He’s sure to be better off than he was before, gets higher wages and more constant employment, and the larger his family the more he can claim. I’ve seen many formerly hard-working young men completely change their character once the children continue to arrive

“Nowadays there are few people who will struggle to maintain their families without parochial assistance. Their main object is to get as much as possible out of the rates. A man is no sooner out of work than he goes to the parish for relief even though he may have been earning good money the week before. But they don’t spend it on the family. They squander their money in the public-house or the new beer-shops almost as soon as they are paid.”

“But they’ll spend everything they can on beer anyway”, Smith chipped in. “Ramsey is one of the worst places in this regard. I’ve heard several wives say they were worse off when their husbands were in work and earning 20s to 30s a week than when they were living on bare

parish allowance. And it was just because the husbands did not have so much money to spend in the pub.

“The real problem is that scroungers with large families know how to exploit the system. They know it is the parish’s duty to find them somewhere to live. So when the rent-day approaches he’ll go to the overseer with a sob story that that he cannot afford the rent and that the landlord has threatened to seize his furniture and turn him out on the street. But it will cost more to keep the family in the workhouse than it would for the parish to pay the rent of the cottage. So the overseers pay the rent and the family carries on as before. What sort of an example is that to any hardworking man?”

“And despite what Chambers says, the workhouse is not a deterrent. They are kept clean and are whitewashed once or twice a year. There’s often a school attached where the children learn some basic reading and writing and the only work the able-bodied men do is to cultivate the workhouse garden. Inmates get meat for dinner three days in the week, bread and cheese, or any remaining cold meat, or soup, on the other days; gruel for breakfast, and bread and cheese or gruel for supper. All in all they live comfortably well, so come the cold weather when there’s little farm work anyway many try any dodge to get themselves in. And once they are in they’re in no hurry to quit.

“And the workhouse manager is happy to let them stay: he gets paid so much a head to look after them and the more he has the more profit he makes. Now what the overseers in of Huntingdon, Godmanchester, Kimbolton and Stanground do is to impose a strict regime: the inmates are not permitted to go about at their pleasure, but are confined within the walls of the workhouse. Once discipline is imposed the able-bodied men seldom remain long.”

“I’m sure”, joined in Bowtell “that if they made the workhouse inmates do piece-work at wages smaller than they could get working for the farmer and if that the parish officials were harder task-masters, then the situation would soon change. But frankly I’ve enough work to do to earn my own living; I may be an overseer of the poor but I’d end up a pauper if I expended all my efforts trying to reform a system which is so tainted. In some parts of the country you have landed gentry with their mansions who have the authority to do it or new enthusiastic clergy prepared to incur the wrath of their community by bringing in change, but in Cambridgeshire they are few and far between. Then on the other hand you have fanatics like Maberley, the Bourn curate, leading opposition to the new Union Workhouse - but something had to be done because the old system was just to inefficient.”

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The problem for a man taking on a woman with several children is that he did not always know what he was getting. Consider the case of ‘Old John’ Cooper of Whittlesford. He was from a long-established village family and his marriage to Sarah was one that was celebrated. It was a happy match and soon she bore him a son, ‘Young John’. Sadly his bride died shortly after and shortly after that ‘Old John’ married again, to another Sarah. But she too did not live long and John was widowed for a second time by the time he was 35 years old.

So he tried again, this time finding a wife in Elizabeth Hornsey from Swavesey – who people said was no better than she should be. Tales spread of how Elizabeth had married for the first time when only 16 years old by when she already had a one-year-old daughter. Another daughter soon followed, to be followed by five more children before husband Thomas had died at the age of 27. She’d then struck up a close relationship with another Thomas – Thomas Dodson, a widower; it got so serious that the banns were read prior to their wedding, but the marriage never happened.

Five years later she finally got to the altar again, this time as the bride of 'Old John' who at 48 was 12 years her senior. She moved to Whittlesford bringing with her the remaining four children and it did not take long before her eldest daughter, Susan, found a husband in her stepbrother, 'Young John'. Village folk had plenty to gossip about now, especially as both women experimented with herbal medicines and all sorts of ancient remedies. They bewitched pigs and turkeys, the pigs died and the turkeys ran round in circles. A Bottisham man who thought his horse was bewitched came to see Susan; she made broth compounded from horseshoes, nails and iron filings, the horse drank it, and died.

One pretty girl, Ginny, came to her suffering from fits so Elizabeth told her what do to: She had to gather nine sixpences from nine separate married men and take them to the village blacksmith who would make them into a bracelet which Ginny had to wear. She was quite insistent it must be the men who gave the money to her or it would have no effect and they were not to know why she wanted it. Well it took Ginny some time before she managed to get her sixpences and nine wives had fits when they learned how their husband had given their money away to such an attractive young lady!

There was one well-off man – name of Barker - suffering from cancer, his face and neck swollen terribly. He went to Addenbrooke's Hospital but there was nothing they could do. So he came to Elizabeth who told him he had to rub his face and neck with a dead woman's hand. Soon afterwards he heard how a woman had died in a nearby village so he went along, knocked on the door, said how sorry he was to hear about it – though in truth he'd never met her during life. Well the husband was quite taken in by all this and invited him into the cottage where a woman was lying on the settle, quite peacefully. They were soon chatting like old friends and so the man asked whether he'd take a glass of beer. No, that didn't seem appropriate for a time like this, but a nice glass of water would be welcome. Out goes the husband to the pump in the yard and Barker takes his chance. He goes over to the body lifts her hand and starts rubbing his face with it. All of a sudden the woman opens her eyes and starts to scream! Husband comes running in to find the 'corpse' on her feet and Barker flaked out on the floor like he's dead. It turns out he'd got the wrong cottage, the woman had just been sleeping and had woken up to find this stranger in her house trying to take the rings off her finger – as she thought. So she'd walloped him. By this time half the village had turned up to see what was going on and that was the talk of the taverns for months afterwards. As for Barker - well he never dared show his face again so whether it cured him nobody can say!

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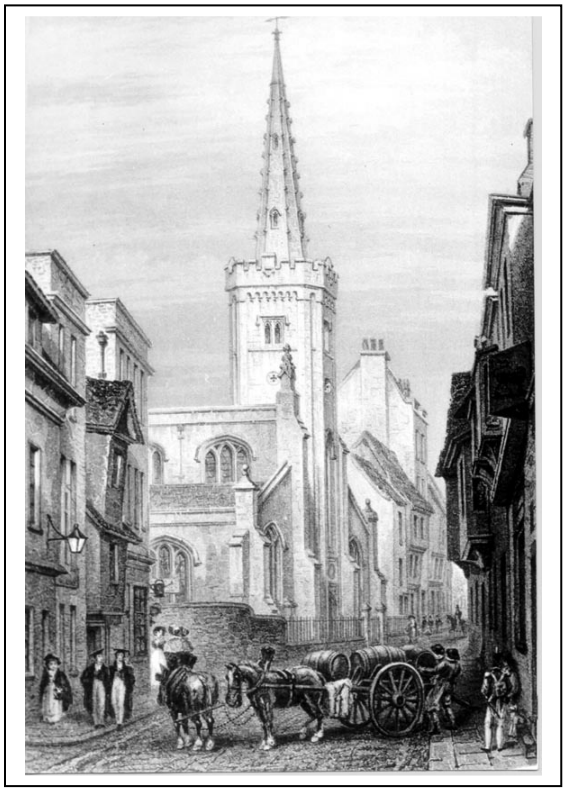
Pickwick was getting a little uneasy, wondering whether his acquaintances Elliott Smith and John Bowtell might be embroidering the stories they were telling; but one was an auctioneer, the other a bookbinder-turned-librarian, surely they would not be capable of imagination.

He decided to probe a little further into the materials collected by Bowtell senior – surely he must have been the greatest of Cambridge's antiquarians, but who was this William Cole that Whyman the publican had mentioned – was it only days ago?

It prompted a quick response from Bowtell junior: "Cole – yes I know of him, an opinionated fellow, an inveterate borrower of manuscripts that he would hold on to for years. He would inveigle them from church chests, by promising the incumbents that once he'd copied them out they would be available for researchers to get at and thus reduce the number of callers knocking on their vicarage doors. Then what happened when he finally died, did he deposit his notes in Cambridge – no he did not! He left some sarky will saying that to leave them to King's College would be tantamount to throwing them into a horse pond – well that was fair enough for their dons are not interested in anything apart from Latin or Greek. Did he leave them to the university library – no! Instead he instructed his executors to lock up his library,

put everything in a large wooden box and send them down to the British Museum in London. Even then they were not to allow anybody to look at them for 20 years after his death.

"As for his own body, that was to be buried under the belfry of St Clement's Church to rest alone on two blocks of oak in a small brick vault. He made much of how the coffin was to be a plain one, none of this blackening and gilt nails – all very tasteful and low-key. But then this respecter of old things decided he wanted to change the very fabric of the church itself. The old wooden steeple was to be pulled down and a new brick tower built in its place over the graves of his two sisters; then on top of that there was to be a spire like that of Holy Trinity church.



"Well things dragged on and on, like they do in Cambridge; it was December 1782 when Cole died and it took nearly 40 years before the tower was built, a poor piece of work by that villain Charles Humfrey. By then most people had forgotten all about him. They can't escape him now though. His name is inscribed, bold as brass, on the outside of the new tower: 'Deum Cole'. Now some folk say this is Latin for 'Worship God' but I see this pun as a miserable attempt to perpetuate his memory. One of the people involved said as much in a letter to the Cambridge Chronicle:

Since to old Cole (Heaven rest his soul
Who loved God's worship holy)
This spire we owe, we've placed below
His motto 'Deum Cole'

"Then on the top of the spire there's a weather vane that looks just like Cole's crest with a quill pen commemorating his writing."

[SCAN 8998 – VIEW OF ST CLEMENT'S CHURCH WITH ITS TOWER AND SPIRE FUNDED BY WILLIAM COLE]

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But things are not going smoothly in St Clement's church even today, Smith explained. "They have an unusual method of electing their churchwardens. The parishioners gather together in the vestry and then all retire into the body of the church except the existing wardens. The wardens debate amongst themselves and select two individuals who they summon in to join them. Then the rest of the congregation make their own selection.

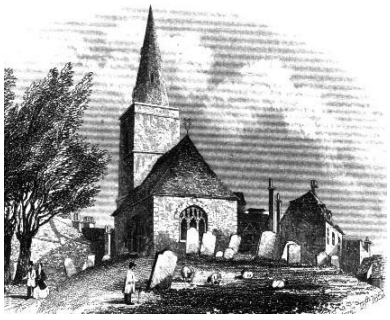
These four chosen parishioners select two others to bring their number up to six. It is this select gathering that choose both churchwardens. It's a process that has been going on for centuries. But recently there's been a move to change it to the more usual system whereby the vicar nominates one warden and the congregation the other.

Anyway it's got to the stage when Francis Eaden was elected but the stand-in minister refused to swear him into office. That is entirely out of order – he had no authority to challenge the merits or correctness of an election. Even if several people had been elected, some of them irregularly and illegally yet if they came to be sworn into office he had to do it and leave the merits of the election to be decided by another tribunal

But at last the St Clement's church is likely to be still standing in a year or so which is more than you can say for the old church of St Peter's just up Castle Hill. About 50 years ago people were determined to pull it down and use the stones to repair the roads – not that they're have filled many potholes: its such a small structure, possibly the smallest church in the country. The roof was entirely dropping in and all the windows demolished.

People approached the Bishop of Ely who'd offered to give £100 for repairs and had set aside an elegant pulpit and altar that he'd saved after the sale of the Palace of Ely House in Holborn and was in Salmon's warehouse. He said that at least the tower and steeple should be saved.

A group of academics tried to raise the money to repair it, though vicar would not support them – it would just add to his workload if the church came back into operation. So it just stood there derelict and would have been forgotten had not a young gentlemen who was a Fellow of the Antiquarian Society of London not got a ladder and climbed in through the window. He made a drawing of the old font and gained the church some publicity. It's a curious structure, the corners finished off with grotesque figures, half human and half fish. Some say it was once part of the fountain in the Roman governor's garden and that the church stands on the site of an old Roman temple. In the end they did some sort of repairs, not so much as to restore the church but just to commemorate that it had once stood there.



Then they got Mr Masters to repair the steeple and Cole to his credit decided to present an old weathercock that he'd acquired after it had blown down from the top of Peterhouse. It had been erected by Andrew Perne, Dean of Ely, and incorporated his initials. But he had switched his religious allegiances so much to hold on to his office throughout the restoration that nobody could decide whether the A.P. stood for A Protestant, A Puritan or A Papist. Anyway Cole had spent a guinea in repairing it and its to his credit that he presented it to the church where it still stands.

[SCAN OF ST PETER'S CHURCH 1417]

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There has been talk of uniting the churches of St Peter with St Giles across the road, which is probably one of the oldest in Cambridge, Bowtell continued. It was founded in about 1090 by Hugoline, wife of Picot the sheriff. Poor lady she suffered - not only being wife to such an obnoxious man – but also for her health. She was taken so ill that she swore that if she recovered she'd build a church to the honour of the blessed St Giles. What's more she'd also endow a religious house in perpetual service to god. Three days later she had recovered

She funded the church and established a convent with six canons. This became place of instruction, the first of its kind in Cambridge - so you could say the church contributed to the formation of the University. But about 1112 the canons moved to a new site at Barnwell.

Then in 1349 the Black Death hit Cambridge and brought desolation to the area around the castle. The condition were so bad that men went raving mad because of the filth of the streets and the smell of the dung from the pound in Pound Hill. Mind you was nearly as bad these days!

Any after the fever abated the situation was so bad that the third of the old churches in that area - All Saints - fell into a ruinous state and was combined with St Giles. But St Peter's has always stayed separate, though the same parson usually holds the two benefices.

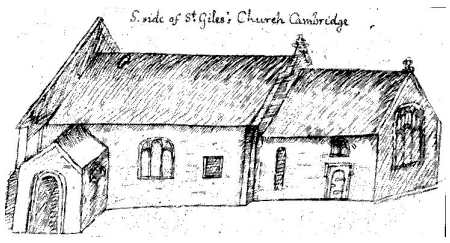
The Rev William Farish, Professor of Mathematics, was vicar from 1800 up to a couple of years ago. Now he knew his subject, laying out all his apparatus – the cog-wheels, cylinders, bars, pulleys, cranks, screws, blocks and so on - and then in the simplest, almost infantile, manner, explaining all the intricate modes by which the wheels worked upon one another, their multipliers, their momentums and their checks. And then there was his sawing-machine, his hat manufacturing, his oil press, and cannon-foundry – all abundant stores of entertainment - while his explanations of the art of mining and ship-building were perfect in clearness and precision. Despite his appearance he was a very clever man.

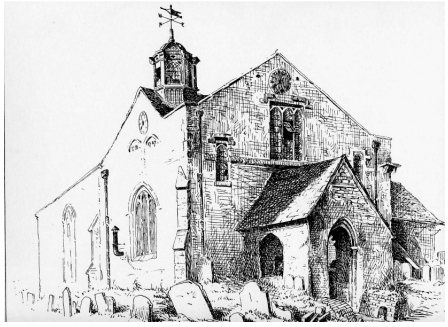
But he was very absent-minded. Once when his servant brought his horse to the church door he mounted it, then dismounted on the other side and walked away until his servant shouted after him. He lived at Merton House where he decided to divide up a large bedroom into two; he made a moveable partition to split it up but one night decided to remove it. Well it was his house, he should be able to do what he wanted; only he'd forgotten that he'd let the rooms out and had by a lady on one side of the partition and a gentleman on the other.

It's a wonder he could find his way the church or recognise it when he got there. But then he changed it about something tremendous. He knocked down the north wall and north aisle and extended the nave. Now there's a gallery a three-decker pulpit, with the font in front of it and square pews but few worshippers are able to see the altar let alone the old Norman chancel arch that proves the church's antiquity.

It does have an old clock, dated 1671, which was moved from the outside of King's College chapel in 1817. But if you want to know what it was like a century ago then you have to read William Cole's notes.

But all Cole's material had been sent down to London. Well not quite all, one volume had been liberated by uncle John Bowtell; it might join the rest eventually – but was too interesting to let go just yet.
478





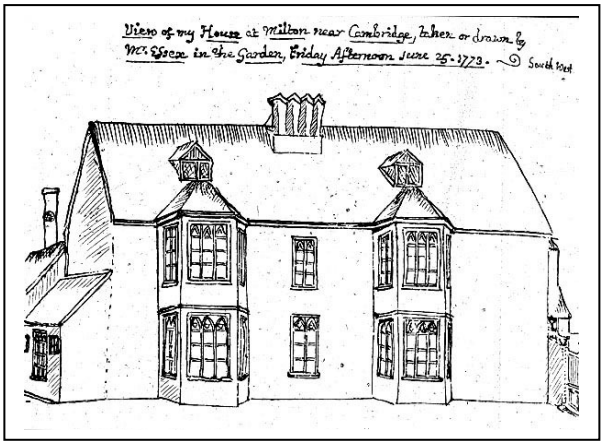
Pickwick could not understand how such a valuable thing as one of William Cole's notebooks could go missing. He himself was assiduous about the safety of his own scrapbooks for without them how could he remember the people and places he had met? How could he hope to recall all the fascinating snippets to share with members of the Pickwick Club at their meetings at the George and Vulture Inn off Lombard Street in the City of London? And without them how would Boz be able to compile the second volume of his "Pickwick's Papers".

But John Bowtell the bookbinder-turned-librarian explained that his uncle John, the bookbinder-turned-rescuer-of-ancient-documents, had certainly handled them all and one volume had been left with him for rebacking after it had been damaged in Cole's house at Milton. That was a building Elliot Smith knew well; he had been there with his father during the time Cole had rented it from King's College from 1768 to his death in 1782, and there he had made the acquaintance of the Reverend's man servant, Tom Wood.

Tom had explained that Cole had been desperate to move. He was living in Waterbeach vicarage which he found extremely small, inconvenient and wretched: the fire smoked sending him dashing out of the parlour into the hall for fresh air, though when the hall fire was lit it smoked worse than the parlour. But the main problem was the neighbours: the parish swarmed with nonconformists and no matter which way the Vicar looked heresy stared him in the face. The house at Milton seemed ideal, although he'd thought the rental of £17 a year for a six-roomed farmhouse in very bad repair was somewhat high.

On Cole's death Elliott Smith had been back and been amazed at the changes. He'd knocked the hall and parlour into one room to form his study and made the kitchen into a parlour, containing a 'sopha' on which he used to rest. He built a narrow hall with a staircase at one end and a gallery, a new kitchen and brewhouse with rooms for servants upstairs. Then in the garden he added a coach- house with dovecote above it, a new stable and other offices together with a lean-to roofed summer-house. He even had two fish-ponds made by professional 'bankers' from the fens.

But this was no ordinary transformation: the antiquarian had used stones from the gateway of the Dominican Friary which once stood in front of Emmanuel College, one of which he placed on each side of his front door. He'd got cart-loads of other stones from the gateway of the old University Schools when that was pulled down then demolished his old manor house of Halls at Haddenham bringing for more loads of timber, bricks and panelling. According to Wood, Cole had made an agreement with the builders that rooms were to be ready by Michaelmas, 1769, but long before that time the two of them were spending the day there, Tom doing the internal painting and working on the Beaufette cupboard in the kitchen.



Cole's friends did not mind sharing 'pot luck' with him. Even while carpenters were putting up the old wainscot in the little parlour and plastering the closets in the great parlour Mr and Mrs. Bentham visited, dining on beans and bacon in the great parlour which was then without floor or windows. As soon as the main structural changes were finished Cole brought his books, china and lighter furniture in his chaise and by Lady Day the shifting of furniture had almost been accomplished. Finally on April 3rd, 1770, his bed was brought to Milton on a very wet day; it was the final act – they were in. But the changes were only beginning. [SCAN 105.41]
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William Cole's house at Milton was a devil to keep clean, Tom Wood had confided and despite all his hard work it was almost impossible to see out of any of the windows. It wasn't that they were dirty, just full of coloured glass. Cole was an avid collector of stained glass: he was given it, bought it or stole it - claiming it was necessary in order to save it from destruction. It turned up in carts and bundles from virtually everywhere in the county.

There were dozens of coat of arms including those of the Paris family from a small house at the further end of Linton on the left of the road to Horseheath which Cole had first seen when he was a schoolboy there. There were the arms of the Chapman family from a house at Babraham that had probably been built in the sixteenth century. The building itself did not look of any antiquity but the massive chimney stacks and open hearths were several centuries old. It included an elegant glass representation crucifix with Our Lady and St. John standing below with behind them an officer on horseback. There was another Virgin Mary with the Lord on her lap after the crucifixion that Cole had got from Mr. Clarke, Vicar of Elm

He’d acquired the arms of Edward the Confessor from Ely Cathedral, the Veres from West Wickham and Bishop Hotham from Fen Ditton - all stolen by dignitaries of the churches, together with one Cole had himself removed without permission from Burnham while he was vicar there.

But there were a mass of other quaint and curious subjects decorating the windows: an elephant with a castle on his back from Little Wilbraham Church and a barrel with" W " on it at one end and a ladder at the other from a house in Blackamore's Yard Cambridge. There were pictures of three rabbits feeding, and an owl on a perch with a partridge picking an ear of wheat which had come from Haddenham from where he’d also acquired a soldier in armour holding a spear.

Not even Cole appreciated all of them. The bow window of his bedroom was rather dismally adorned with a black shield with a white death's head and the words 'Memento mori’ dated 1553. When he got older and his health declined so the devil’s head became less attractive and he’d put it into a window in Milton Church.

There was a lot from two houses in Bridge Street belonging to Alderman Nutting when he’d reglazed with white glass. He’d also givena picture of St. Chad together with a figure of Bishop of Lichfield from a former students hostel in Blackamore's Yard. It was one of Cole’s most valued pieces though he also liked the flowers he acquired from the old University printing house.

But much of his treasures came from Cambridge colleges who were busily throwing out the coats of arms of their founders and benefactors in a way reminiscent of the destruction wreaked by William Dowsing during the Civil War. He acquired the arms of the founders of Gonville and Caius that were ripped out when the chapel was newly fitted up, along with those of the founders of Christ's College, the Countess of Richmond and her son King Henry VII. These had been taken down by Harlock the glazier and sent to his house. In fact Cole got quite a lot of glass that way including a pacing lion in black and gold from a living room in St John’s College after the occupant decided he would prefer some glass he could see out of.

He ended up with so much painted glass that he ran out of windows in the house and had to build a summerhouse just to put more in. It was his lifetime’s passion but not one to be handed down to posterity. In his will Cole had directed that all the painted glass in the windows of his house at Milton was to be taken out and sold. This had been done and where it was now was a mystery.

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It was impossible whole houseful of stained glass at Milton to have disappeared – but it had happened. There was just one man who could have divulged the secrets and that was Tom Wood, William Cole’s favourite servant, but he had refused to divulge any details.

Their’s had been something of a strange relationship, so gossips had it. Tom had come with Cole from his previous ministry at Blecheley together with his sister and brothers. As far as people could discover his father had gone bankrupt leaving his wife and eight children with nowhere to live. Cole had taken pity on them and let them stay in the Rectory. He’d appointed the father as Parish Clerk but discovered he was often too drunk to ring the bells or officiate at the services. Every time he got drunk he promised to reform, every time he promised he got drunk again.

Tom had been a young lad of 15 when he first came to the Rectory so small and timid that his dad had to sleep with him, and never wholly courageous on a dark night. Cole took to him like a son. He bought him a hat with a silver lace and a new livery so that he looked smart. He

fretted like an old hen, telling him off if he even went outside in the rain and worrying that he might get too hot while haymaking; when Tom was stricken with scarlet fever he'd became distraught.

Tom's uncle was supposed to be an expert in horseflesh so when Cole wanted a new coach horse he sought his advice. But the first animal he bought was a jumper – no fences or gates would keep it in a pasture; they tried dispose of it at Woburn Fair but nobody would buy and they finally got rid of it at a loss at Leighton Buzzard. The next one was too small and the one after that broken-winded; that one cost him nine guineas but he only got three when he sold it on. In the end he'd been cheated so often he refused to have any further dealings with the man.

Despite a family comprising habitual drunkards and notorious horse-dealers Cole forgave Tom anything. Once he sent him down to London to have new blades and tines put in some old knives and forks only to have them stolen from his pocket while listening to the organ in St Paul's Cathedral.

When the time came for Cole to move to Cambridgeshire he'd wanted to bring Tom with him but his mother had objected. The Reverend had insisted that he was so honest, sober and good that he would never get another servant like him. In the end he had to bring Tom's brother Jem – a drunkard like his father – and sister Molly as well. She suffered attacks of ague and was rather forgetful. She starved his blackbird to death, let his parrot flyaway and watched while the cat ate his dinner. When he mentioned it to her she just replied "Good-morning". When Molly left to get married the matrons of his acquaintance vied in their efforts to find him a suitable replacement, anxious to get another woman into the household.

Cole's feelings for Tom were expressed in his will. He wrote: "I give and devise unto my honest, sober faithful servant, Thomas Wood, who has lived with me from a boy, going on 40 years, all my freehold and copyhold lands and tenements in Milton and Impington. Also I give him £50, and mourning, and all my wearing apparel, shirts, neckcloths and handkerchiefs, except 16 shirts which I last made up of Berry hemp. And also the bed and furniture on which he lies. He has been a faithful trusty servant to me, never gave me occasion to find fault, never knew him drunk, never told me a falsity, and is guilty of no vice that I know of. He might have gotten better service and has a bad constitution, and I think it our duty to provide for his maintenance". But the money did not buy complete loyalty.

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Tom Wood had been servant to the Reverend William Cole for some 40 years and been well-rewarded for his service. During that time he'd got to know the clergyman's likes and dislikes and had observed the way he treated his parishioners.

Cole had been a conscientious parson prepared to undertake tasks other clergy had refused. Once he agreed to conduct the funeral service for a man who'd died of smallpox after none of the other ministers would go anywhere near, fearful they would carry the infection to their own family. But he had insisted that the man be buried without ceremony and said the words next day over the partially filled-in grave.

He'd cultivated a wide range of friendships being as much at ease among his workers in the hayfield as he was with the learned world of Cambridge University. Horace Walpole welcomed his company, the Roman Catholic squire of Sawston was often his host and guest and many interesting people were regular visitors to the house at Milton.

However Wood was critical of the way his master pandered to certain of the landed gentry, especially the loose-living Lord Montfort of Horseheath Hall. Cole had spent a lot of time

there as a boy and got on very well with the First Lord until he committed suicide in 1755. He disliked the son, a soldier in the militia, a man of loose morals, a drunkard and a gambler who squandered the family estate until in the end he'd gone bankrupt. The lavish Hall with its menagerie, orangery and magnificent gardens had been sold off and pulled down just five years before Cole's death in 1782.

Cole had been part of its demise for he was always accepting invitations to that grand balls which were attended by the local nobility such as Sir John and Lady Cotton, Sir Thomas and Lady Hatton and most of the heads of Colleges. More than that he became virtually the ticket agent - people who wanted invitations applied to him to get them: even the Mayor of Cambridge came begging for one. They were certainly magnificent occasions with nearly 300 people dining and dancing and festivities continuing until four in the morning. While others imbibed fine win, Cole claimed he stuck to water. But Tom was not so sure.

At other times Cole tried to avoid dinner at Horseheath as when Tom King of Catley and Mr. Harrison, apothecary of Linton, both heavy drinkers, had been invited. But his Lordship would take no refusal and Tom had had to drive him over. As usual Montfort had tried to make his guests drunk, but this time was overtaken himself and 'en Bravado' drank four large glasses of rhubarb tea, which made him very ill. He also got quarrelsome, poking fun at Cole for an hour or two until he could take it no more and hit back. "I reproved him without reserve, and told him that I would not live with him or be his dependent for his estate, and he begged my pardon", Cole boasted. Next morning his lordship had ordered his butler to put two bottles of Tockey wine (worth a guinea a bottle) together with three braces of hares into Cole's chaise.

There'd been other gifts including a beautiful red and blue parrot, a haunch of venison and, three leaden statues for his garden. But it was books Cole loved best. He'd been delighted when Lord Montfort passed on a set of 20 volumes of Journals of the House of Commons – not that it cost him anything since every member of both houses of Parliament were given new ones. To Tom it was just more paper to be squeezed into an ever-cluttered house at Milton. He'd been even more excited to receive a parcel containing a peace-offering to excuse Montfort's latest misbehaviour. It contained a most beautiful illuminated manuscript on vellum with a dozen religious pictures in it, bound in red morocco. Best of all was a price-ticket of £30. "But you should have seen his reaction when he discovered that Montfort had only given £5 for it. He refused to keep it in the house and gave it away to his doctor!"

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William Cole the great antiquarian who amassed volumes of historical notes and sketches of Cambridgeshire was also – according to his long-time manservant Tom Wood - a man who loved gossip. On many a journey back from dining with his Society friends the clergyman had been happy to share indiscretions which Wood in turn passed on to the other servants.

The housekeeper could sympathise with the plight of William Munsey who liked to entertain but was very short of table linen. His wife had to wash every scrap they owned whenever they had any company to dinner. So she found a solution: she used to borrow the altar cloth from the vicar's wife to cover her table. All went well until William stained it with red wine and they dare not ask again!

They particularly enjoyed scandal concerning the highest members of county nobility especially how Mr. Marmaduke Dayrell of Shudy Camps had been delighted to have a son by his lady of a West Indian family. The two or three first children had been of the wrong sort, but the son secured the family estate There's a monument to the beautiful Henrietta 'a fine

black woman' near the altar at Shudy Camps church but it doesn't say that he did not marry her till he was assured that she was of a breeding constitution.

The problems of minor gentry amused them: "Mr Church of the Manor House Great Shelford took a second wife - a shopkeeper's daughter from Haddenham. She was only a young woman whereas he was 60 but it never worked out as he hoped. At last they parted. It was said that he catched her with Mr. Lloyd a physician of St. Catherine's Hall"

Councillors were fair game: Mr. Nutting, a Cambridge Alderman and Merchant, was a showy man who kept much company. He lived in a better style than was common with people of his rank, with the result that he had little fortune to provide for his three daughters, one of whom married the Cambridge postmaster, Mr Antrobus. It was from Nutting that Cole acquired much of his historical information for he used his position to borrow papers from the Corporation archives that never got replaced again. It was documents of this sort that John Bowtell senior had rescued from being sold as waste paper and passed for safe keeping to Downing College.

But it seemed even the highest in the University were not above a little creative acquisition. "When William Cooke was vice-chancellor he decided to clear out the lumber in the Old Schools. Among it was an elegant carved chair of Virginia Walnut with lion claw feet that had been made when the Duke of Newcastle was installed as Chancellor. It had crimson velvet cushions decorated with about six yards of broad gold lace - the lace itself was worth above half a guinea. This Dr Cooke had a mind to get cheap, but did not want anybody to know. So he called the Deputy School Keeper and said: 'Marshall I will give you this chair'. The man was very thankful and took it to his home. Then two or three days after Cooke comes again and says, 'Marshall, I don't see that chair I gave you, what have you done with it?' 'Sir,' says Marshall, 'I have sent it to my house and use it to sit in'. 'Oh, very well, you have done wisely' says the Vice-Chancellor, 'but I don't think it a fit chair for your use. What may such an old chair be worth?' Unthinkingly Marshall replied, 'About a crown'. 'Very good,' says the old fox. Putting his hand in his pocket he drew out five shillings which he gave to Marshall & told him to send the chair to his lodge. That chair was fairly worth a guinea-and-a-half of anybody's money. He's still got it in his house only he's taken the lace off to decorate his wife's petticoat

It was gossip of this kind that had turned other antiquarians against Cole and his jottings. Indeed Henry Turner of St John's went to far as to suggest that this was the reason he had sent his notebooks down to London for safe keeping and insisted they be kept secret for twenty years after his death. Certainly had they stayed in Cambridge they are unlikely to have survived.

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It was time to depart from the cramped pews of All Saint's church but Pickwick wanted to grab the opportunity to view the Cambridge University Library, now that he had cultivated the friendship of John Bowtell, one of the under-librarians. It was a visit that Elliott Smith was also pleased to make.

As they walked Bowtell gave an account of the development of the library which had in 1546 consisted of about 170 volumes in a wretched condition. Despite this various people had donated their books forcing it to move from one part of the University's Old Schools to another in search of space.

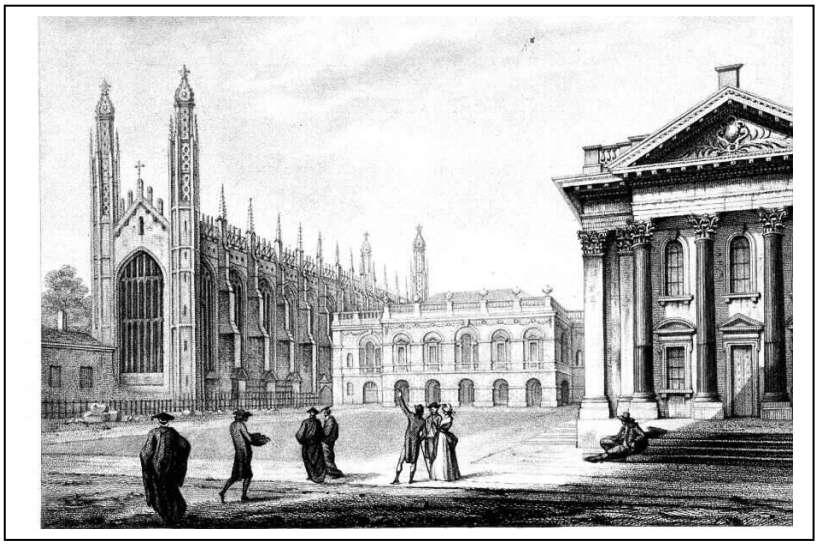
Then things got serious. First in 1709 Cambridge was appointed one of the places where a copy of all the books published in England had to be deposited – why they even received a

copy of the Pickwick Papers! But many of the books were by no means scholarly or suitable for University study and were quietly disposed of.

To make matters worse in 1715 King George I presented the University with a library that had belonged to John Moore, the Bishop of Ely. It had cost him 6,000 guineas and the books had to go somewhere. The only space suitable was a room where formal ceremonies had been held for centuries. It had long become too small with major events being held in Great St Mary's church. Now there was an excuse to build a new Senate House.

For this the University needed extra land so they turned their attention to the mixture of houses and inns on either side of Regent Walk between the Old Schools and King's Parade. They obtained an Act of Parliament, cleared the site and planned for the future.

Various architects were asked to produce designs; inevitably there was delays, cancellations and changes but eventually James Gibbs' plan was accepted. Work started in 1722 and dragged on for eight years; even then the west end was only finished in brick. For this was to be just the first part of a grand scheme that would see another wing to the south for the University Press and a third range in front of the Old Schools. However these proposals caused renewed uproar with the Master of Caius complaining that it would ruin the view of King's Chapel. Eventually the idea was dropped and the end wall of the new Senate House finally faced with stone. At the same time they pulled down old hovels abutting on to the tower of Great St Mary's church and repaired the wall to disguise where they'd stood. Then with the erection of the new iron railings King's Parade became a much wider and grander thoroughfare than ever before.



But it was not all over: the University called in a different architect to add a Royal Library to the east wall of their Old Schools. Once more this caused controversy, animosity and ill-temper, but it quickly became accepted. It had also become too small.

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Senate House Passage in that autumn of 1838 was the scene of great activity. Ancient buildings were being demolished to provide the rubble foundations for new ones. Blocks of stone transported by barge and unloaded in Garret Hostel Lane were being delivered to the site as work continued on new University Library.

It had been a tortuous process to get to this stage, Bowtell explained. Despite the previous extensions more shelves had soon become necessary for books but the other University departments were also demanding extra space for their teaching activities within the Old Schools quadrangle.

The Woodwardian Collection of geological items had been given to the University on condition that it would be properly exhibited. Instead it was crammed into a room so small

that several specimens overflowed into the Professor's own apartments. The Botanical collection was expanding rapidly but decreasing at the same time: not only was its room too small it was also damp, which meant that various of the specimens were rotting away. As for the mineralogical collection that the University had spent £1,500 in acquiring – well there was no space whatsoever to display it.

It was a slightly better situation with regard to Sir Busick Harwood's anatomical museum with its set of wax models. There was a room adjacent to the lecture-room but it too was damp and many of the exhibits were locked in a dark closet where they could not be seen.

The Professor of Physics had nowhere he could lecture, nor did the Lucasian Professor of Mathematics. The Professor of Chemistry used to have a room but the Professor of Modern History had acquired it, while the Professor of Greek had found a space at Trinity College which was just about large enough – provided he did not attract more students. This was unlikely to be a problem for the Professor of Natural Philosophy for he had found it impossible to find anywhere at all and was likely to give up lecturing altogether.

It was obvious that something had to be done if science in all its branches was to continue to be studied and Cambridge keep pace with developments at Oxford. The University had the expertise, they had the undergraduates wanting to study, they just needed space.

And there was space on the Old Schools site now that the new Pitt Press had been built on the corner of Silver Street. Their old warehouse buildings were unoccupied and could be brought back into use to ease the problems. But not everybody agreed that this was the best solution.

For King's College had been building their new library and Provost's Lodge on the other side of the Gibbs Building and were wanting to dispose of their Old Court. This stood between the Old Schools and Trinity Lane and was the obvious site for the University museums and lecture rooms that were so badly needed.

King's was willing to sell and it was just a case of agreeing a price. The University appointed a valuer who reported that the site was worth about £6,500, so they offered £7,500 to ensure a quick sale. But this was rejected by King's who came up with a price of over £14,500. The University offered £12,000, the college said £13,125 and there the matter rested. It had been a period of great debate and haggling, confided Elliott Smith the professional appraiser, but the University would not budge and things stagnated for two years. Eventually King's gave in and accepted the money that was on the table. Now the real haggling began.

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By 1829 the University of Cambridge had the land it urgently needed to expand its Library and scientific museums; what was needed was a speedy agreement about just what should be done with it.

A syndicate was appointed consisting of various college Masters, Professors and senior academics. Against all expectation they quickly came up with a detailed scheme and invited four architects to draw up plans for their consideration. They were to submit an overall scheme, covering not only the newly-acquired Old Court of King's but the rest of the land in

front of the Old Schools, even though it would be developed in stages over many years. There was no mention of how much they would be allowed to spend on the buildings but there was the promise of £100 which would be paid to the those whose schemes were turned down,

The four architects submitted five designs as Mr Charles Cockerell offered two alternatives. The committee unanimously accepted one of these, but it was not to be that straightforward.

After the decision had been taken the various plans were put on public exhibition and the syndicate came under attack from other members of the academic community who felt their choice was only the best of a bad bunch – none really did what was wanted. They responded by admitting that they did not like any of them either but thought that Cockerell was the best person to produce a different design. But this meant the University would be committed not to a scheme but to an architect and could well end up with something that none approved of.

As nobody could decide what to do they appointed another syndicate to look into the University finances and see what money they could afford to spend. And just to make sure it did its work properly it would be chaired by the Vice Chancellor and Master of Sidney Sussex College, the irascible Dr Chafy. It soon became clear they couldn't afford any of the designs and proposed that each of the four architects should be given his £100 and leave it at that. However others pointed out that the University had given a commitment to employ one of architects who had dropped everything to rush their designs through. Meanwhile Cockerell came up with a third plan and dropped hints that he would modify it to meet the wishes of the University.

Another syndicate was set up to look again at both plans and finance. They wrote to the architects inviting revised designs for just the Old Court site but making it clear there was to be no more payment to those whose scheme were rejected. One dropped out but the others sent in amended plans. Two of them stuck to the brief they had been given, one did not.

Cockerell came up with something different and found powerful backing from one of the original committee, Mr Peacock of Trinity who produced two pamphlets – one largely dictated by Cockerell – extolling its merits. Other dons responded with their own observations and the stage was set for a final decision.

In December 1830 the Syndicate made their choice. They went for the plans of Messrs Rickman and Hutchinson who had demonstrated their abilities with the construction of the New Court and Bridge of Sighs at St John's College, then being completed. They even worked out how it would be funded. Now things could surely go ahead speedily. But this is Cambridge; the scheme was never submitted for ratification by the Senate. The whole project was shelved and nothing happened for another four years.

Then in March 1834 yet another syndicate was convened; they wrote to each of the architects again to say the University had abandoned all plans for a new Library and offering them a hundred-guinea payment – five pounds more than promised - to close the contract. After some haggling all accepted – except Cockerell. He wasn't going to be fobbed off so easily.

486

The University of Cambridge was in a poor financial state in 1835. They had spent £12,000 to buy the Old Court of King's College so that they could pull down the buildings and construct a new University Library and various museums. They had commissioned four architects to draw up detailed schemes and then changed their minds and dropped the whole idea.

However within a year the University authorities had changed their minds again: something did have to be done after all. They set up yet another Syndicate including all the heads and bursars of the colleges, all the professors and virtually everybody else they could think of. Their brief was to raise money. In this they were astoundingly successful and soon more than £20,000 had been promised.

It was time for yet another committee to decide how to spend it. This time there was no time for procrastination. They produced three reports within one week calling for every penny in the University chest to be devoted to this new project. The site should be cleared and all the building material disposed of for the best price possible. And who should be responsible for this, asked Botwell. Why none other than his friend and companion, Elliott Smith himself.

But there was one piece of valuable stonework he was not to get his hands on – at least not for the moment. For the old gateway was too venerable an edifice to be pulled down. It should be left standing in its decrepit state until someone came up with a new site for it elsewhere within the University.

The Syndicate decided what was to be built, how much was to be spent and even how the designs should be selected. The same four architects they had employed six years earlier would be approached again and this time there would be a public vote. Each member of the Senate could select his favourite design. If there was no clear majority then the scheme with the fewest votes would be rejected and they would vote again – and again if necessary - until a decision was agreed. In the event the matter was conclusive on the first vote: Charles Cockerell's scheme received 60 votes, his nearest rival only nine while William Wilkins – who had rebuilt much of Cambridge already - got none at all.

It was not going to be that straightforward: Cockerell refused to promise to do it for the sum the University offered. So the process stalled again, the demolition of the Old Court stopped and haggling restarted. While this was taking place the price of building material rose, reducing what could be afforded. Finally in March 1837 it was decided to start work on a new building to house a library holding 180,000 volumes together with space for the mineralogical and geological collections and lecture rooms. This would be erected alongside Senate House Passage. A London firm offered to do the work for nearly £24,000 although by the time their quote had been received it was too late to formally ratify it before the end of the Academic year. This was not going to stop progress and on 29th September came the formal ceremony of laying the foundation stone of this most prodigious project that would carry the University into the new age.

On the due date the stone was lowered into place and tapped with a mallet by the Vice Chancellor after which he made a small speech that was greeted with almost complete silence. Which is not surprising seeing that there was hardly anybody there to witness it: less than ten academics, including Joseph Romilly the University registrary – who Pickwick had met on Parker's Piece – and four or five women. Together they managed to give a little cheer but whether it was of relief for the fact that something was actually happening, or because they heard that the stone from quarries in Whitby was remarkably cheap, was not clear. Nonetheless work was now underway, there was scaffolding and workmen everywhere as the new building started to rise.

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Bowtell lead Pickwick and Elliott Smith down Senate House Passage, keeping well clear of the men labouring on the new University Library, and into the porter's lodge of Trinity Hall.

Here a word with the porter was all that was required before they were shepherded into an upper room from which they could look down on the building work across the lane.

From here Bowtell pointed out the old gate of the Old Court of King's – the one for which Elliott Smith had a ready purchaser if only the University would allow him to pull it down. Beyond was the ancient glass in the window of the existing University Library with the tower of Great St Mary's church filling the background. The immensity of the enterprise etched itself on Pickwick's memory to such an extent that he later returned to Roe's printshop on King's Parade and acquired an engraving of the scene.

Later as he studied it in his rooms at the Castle Inn he realised that something was wrong. There indeed was the gate, the workmen, the scaffolding and the blocks of Whitby stone; there too was the shell of the new Library. But surely not even an architect like Charles Cockerell would be so speedy a workman that he would install the library shelves and even the volumes themselves while the end of the building was open to the elements!

But then they did things strangely at Cambridge, and Trinity Hall was no exception. It was all to do with Dr Mouse and Mr Hare.

Dr William Mouse was the Master of Trinity Hall who died in 1586. He left a set of law books to the library together with £20 to buy lands to maintain the fellows and scholars. Anything left over was to be spent on charitable uses by his executor, Mr Robert Hare. Mouse was obviously well-off for the surplus came to a massive £1,000.

In his turn Hare also made major bequests to the college. He bought a manuscript compiled by the monks of St Austin's Monastery at Canterbury that he gave to the college library on condition that if ever the monastery was rebuilt then it should go back to them. He then added another £600 of his own money to that of Mouse. With it he bought land specifying that the income from the rents should be devoted to maintaining the road from Cambridge to Barkway, which as you know is an easier route for horses and carriages than the main route through Royston.

Now in March 1725 an Act of Parliament was passed for repairing that section of the Barkway road from Cambridge to Fowlmere. Now whether the college was worried they would be overcharged or not I'm not sure but Dr Warren decided to make a proper survey of the road and put up a stone every mile

He set off in July 1725 with two men and a chain of 66 feet in length; they started at Great St Mary's church and headed off towards Trumpington, clanking the chain as they went. Before term restarted they had set up five milestones. At Easter next year they did another five miles and having got into their stride returned in the July to do five more. In May 1727 they were out again until they reached the Angel Inn at Barkway, sixteen miles from Cambridge, going back in the July to set up the last five stones.

All of this created a great sensation, as there'd been nothing like it since Roman times. But Dr Warren wasn't satisfied. When he heard that his Majesty George II was to visit Cambridge in 1728 he decided that something grander needed to be erected. So he took up the first stone and erected an eight-foot high monster in its place. Just to be sure everybody knew who'd paid for it he spent over £5 [FIVE POUNDS] to have the arms of Trinity Hall cut into it together with those of Dr Mouse and Mr Hare. He added the words '1 mile to Great Saint Maries Church Cambridge' and the date AD MDCCXXVIII. But he wasn't done then!

Having seen the reaction to his new large milestone on the Trumpington Road Dr Warren of Trinity Hall decided it was far better than the small markers he had previously erected. So he started to replace them. In May 1728 he erected a larger stone at Barkway, he followed it up the next year with two more, another the year following, four more the year after that and so on until each mile was well and truly marked. Except that some of the stones were not actually a mile apart, one being thirteen feet nearer to Barkway that it should be.

Then there was the problem as to how to show where the measurement had been actually taken from. So once all the stones were complete Dr Warren carved a circular mark on the south-west buttress of Great St Mary's church in Cambridge as a permanent record.

By now he had truly got the measuring bug. Having done the Barkway road he set off in May 1731 to do the one to Haverhill. He stretched his measuring chain from his marking-point, down Petty Cury, past Emmanuel College and out toward the Gogmagog Hills and William Worts' causeway, the one Pickwick had travelled on the carriers cart to Linton - was it only days before?

But then Dr Warren gave up on that road and switched to the one to Huntingdon, setting up five stones before he decided that was far enough and returned to measuring the Haverhill road again for another nine miles.

But whilst Warren explored Cambridgeshire roads, other folk had turned their feet to much more distant destinations. Take James Plumptre, son of the former master of Queens' College, He walked his way around the kingdom, visiting Wales, Derbyshire, Yorkshire, Durham and even the Highlands of Scotland until finally completing his journeying with one of the most challenging of trips. Together with his friend Walter Trevilyan he had set off in July 1800 on journey to the source of the Cam, recording his experiences in his journal.

They had started after breakfast with gaters on their legs, staffs in their hands and a change of linen in their pockets taking with them a little bottle of ammonia to add to the tassels of their nightcaps to keep away the gnats. They enjoyed the stroll along the Backs but thought little of Paradise – a collection of gravel-pit pools overgrown with willows – and soon arrived at Grantchester where men were removing dirt from the river in a bid to improve the land.

Having sketched the church and mill it was on to Harston, a parish in a state of transformation following the recent enclosure of its open fields. The impact was most apparent within the village itself where almost every cottage now had a piece of ground allotted to it that was being turned into gardens; it was too soon to appreciate them but eventually they would present a picturesque appearance. The vicarage was neat, the church had some fine windows but the main attraction was the shell-fishery.

Down by the river men women and children were straining their necks for muscles. Once they glimpsed an open shell on the muddy bottom they poked it with a long stick which the mollusc seized upon only to find itself hoisted out of its watery domain and high and dry on the riverbank. Nobody liked the taste of the fish, it was the shells they were after, some of which were immense and fetched a high price as an ornament.

By now the travellers were feeling hungry but ahead lay Barrington with a choice of inns. There was the Catherine Wheel, the Fortune and the Boot and Shoe. Here they got bread, cheese and butter and eggs together with some very small ale, all indifferent. Whilst they were eating the Overseer of the Poor came to collect the poor rates prompting Plumptre to draw attention to the ale which, from its poverty, should be an object of concern.

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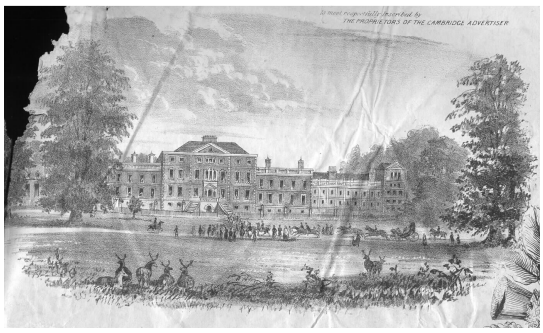
James Plumptre of Clare College had walked around many of the wilder places in the country, including the Welsh and Scottish mountains. It had all been a preparation for what was to be his last great excursion – a journey to the source of the river Cam in the July of 1800 with his friend Walter Trevilyan.

Having dined – not too well – at Barrington they sought a guide to Malton, once a good-sized hamlet before it had been depopulated by enclosure back in the 1490s. The surviving landowners were bought out by the Countess of Richmond and the estate given to her newly-founded Christ's College. It would, she thought, be a useful retiring place whenever plague hit Cambridge – in the same way that King's had a bolt-hole at Hilton and Pembroke planned to evacuate to Linton. The college had built a larger house nearby but this had been demolished in the early 1600s and a causeway that had been constructed towards Whaddon church so that the students might be able to attend service there was also now long lost

Its isolated situation had made it a sanctuary by those suspected of felony, including William Gedney who in the 1400s carried out the profitable employment of receiver of stolen goods. Following a robbery at Kneesworth he had been offered service books and vestments from the church – quite what he did with these Plumptre was uncertain. But he had also disposed of the proceeds of the robbery of a goldsmith at Arrington Bridge who had been making his way to Stourbridge Fair. His attackers were two Kneesworth men who shared a surname later to strike terror in travellers – Turpin and the haul included censers, belts and crosses of silver, necklaces of gold, silver, jet, coral and amber as well as a large sum in money.

In more recent times the Stearn family leased the farm and it was there that John Layer the famous antiquarian found his wife. But when Plumptre visited he found just an ancient timber-framed farmhouse with remains of the chancel of the church of St Nicholas being used as a cow shed and the surviving gravestones now adorned a rickyard



The travellers continued towards Wimpole until they came to a field with a crop they could not recognise. A boy, tending his sheep, explained that it was wild parsnips which were cut and fed to cows in the winter. They continued across the great avenue in Wimpole Park and admired the view of the grand mansion, home to the Earls of Hardwicke.

Plumptre led his companion to the pavilion on the hill from which an extensive view was normally to be obtained, though now little was visible in the gathering gloom. It could not disguise the condition of the pavilion itself;

although constructed only 25 years before at a cost of £1,500 it was now in desolation and ruin. Once it had been a most elegant building with a tea room decorated by paintings of Etruscan figures in colour, but now the blinds were falling to pieces, the stucco which covered the walls was falling off, the pillars rotting away and the building held up by props. The posts and wires that had once protected it from the ravage of the cattle in the fields around had disappeared and it had become a place of shelter for deer and sheep, the floor deep in dung. It was not a place to linger

Nor was the ice-house in any better condition; although sheltered by a grove of chestnuts providing thick shade to keep it as cold as possible, it too was beginning to fall into decay. But at least the ruins of the Gothic Tower on the nearby hill had survived in better state. It had been purposely designed to look as it if were falling down and in the setting rays of the sun seemed as if it had been there for centuries, rather than being newly built in 1750.

It was time to turn their feet away from the park to seek hospitality in a nearby inn.

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Bowtell told how James Plumptre and his companion had in the July of 1800 walked from Wimpole to Arrington. They found a new bridge had recently been built at the side of the ford, much more convenient but less picturesque than the narrow one it had replaced. By now night was drawing in and the pedestrians turned their feet away from the river and towards the Tiger pub at Arrington for the night. Having dined there was just time for a stroll to the village church. Pinned to the door was a notice addressed to the cottagers and labourers of the parish. It promised three prizes ranging from half a guinea to a guinea-and-a-half to those gardeners who grew the greatest quantities of peas, beans, carrots, turnips, cabbages, onions or potatoes in relation to the size of their plot. Any who wished to enter the competition should give their names to the Earl of Hardwick's gardener or one of the other judges appointed by his Lordship.

It was the subject of discussion in the inn that evening, but there was no mention of cucumbers in the list– and cucumbers were a speciality at Sandy, just a few miles further on. There they were planted every eight or nine days so that some seed was always in the ground in case any was cut by the frost. It was a very successful enterprise, the roads were frequently filled with carts loaded with cucumbers – indeed 2,000 bushels of them were sent from the parish in a single week to London, Cambridge and St Neots. From there they were despatched around the country at the low price of three large or five smaller ones for a penny.

Next morning the intrepid travellers continued on their expedition down the Ermine Street to rejoin the Cam a little below Wendy where several streams ran in different directions and currant trees grew almost in the water. They made their way through rich meadows filled with the sheep and cows which gave this part of the county the name of the 'dairies' towards Wendy church. This was a small stuccoed stone building with the Sandys arms over the west door; it boasted a Venetian east window and a bell-turret, but no chancel. It was a replacement for the original medieval church that had got into a most ruinous condition on account of the badness of the foundations and already there was evidence that this one too would not last long. The gable was out of perpendicular and the congregation was noticing how cracks in the walls seemed to be increasing month by month. Any repairs would be a considerable expense on the small parish whose single Sunday service, taken by the curate, attracted a very small congregation.

But number had increased recently, interjected Elliott Smith, since a new minister had been appointed in 1827. It wasn't that the Rev Philips was a great orator, it was just because he was an American and there was a great interest in anything connected with those far-flung shores.

He even claimed to have met James Fenimore Cooper author of the 'Last of the Mohicans', and had encouraged one of his parishioners to emigrate to the New World to escape the poverty of the old.

Plumptre had not gone so far but when exploring the north-east corner of the churchyard they'd found a wattle and daub hut that reminded him of similar structures he'd seen on his journeys in the highlands of Scotland a few years earlier. Then he came across a gravestone with a verse that he committed to his notebook:

"Sore affliction brought me here,
Which was a great loss to my wife dear,
For here I lie, and here must be
In hope her body will be brought to me"

The travellers had sought refreshment at the Windsor Arms next to the church before picking up the course of the Cam and heading off through the fertile fields towards Shingay

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The Rev James Plumptre and his intrepid companion headed along a rough lane and past a fine oak tree towards Shingay and its church – but he could not find a church anywhere. They did however spot a watermill beside the river whose owner was only too happy to share the secrets of his mill, which dated back to the days of the Crusaders, over a bottle of wine.

Shingay one been an important place. For over 400 years the Knights of St. John of Jerusalem, or Knights Hospitallers, that strange order of warrior monks who for so many centuries were the bulwark of Christian Europe against the Moslem hordes, had made it their base. They had erected a Preceptory, something like a small secular monastery from which to manage their estates in the neighbourhood. It had a large refectory or dining hall whose windows were gay and bright with coats of arms of mediaeval preceptors and masters of the order, fragments of which were to be found in the fields. Now it had disappeared into the grassy meadows, its site marked by a dried-out moat and trenches left by the removal of the foundations. But some reminder of it remained in the form of a gatepost fountain from which a stream of water issued out of the greensand.

A sketch by William Cole of the chapel which used to Shingay in the 18th century.

The miller told the tale of how on October 28th 1371 members of the order had gathered from every direction for a meeting here at this tranquil spot. The sound and sight of so many Knights as they trotted along the North road, the Oxford road, the Cambridge road and the London road had made a great impression on the villagers. But a tangible reminder of their presence lingered on, for the bodies of criminals and suicides that could not be interred in consecrated ground, could be buried here. Long after the suppression of the Order in 1536 the traditions of this unusual practice lingered for in 1640 John Layer of Shepreth recorded that a fairy cart or bier was kept to fetch the corpses of condemned criminals for burial.

Nearby was the site of Shingay Hall, once a place of some importance. But the great Sandys family had moved away, retaining just a few rooms for their occasional use and leasing the rest to farmers. By 1792 it had been divided into tenements before being demolished four years later and the materials sold, though some of the old stonework was still to be seen incorporated in the outbuildings of Manor Farm.

As for the church it was a sad story. The original building had survived the ravages of William Dowsing, who'd destroyed a cross and fifteen pictures during the Civil War, only to be pulled down in the 1690s. It had been replaced by a new chapel built by Lord Orford, a small single room of only two bays, paved with brick with white marble round the altar and an east window containing the Orford arms. But now it stood in ruins, a shelter for horses that were treading down the pews and a harbour for gypsies and trampers who had turned the house of prayer into a den of thieves.

But the demise of the church had not merely been due to a lack of congregation; even in 1450s the income had not been sufficient to support a vicar and the preceptor took all the revenue in return for finding a chaplain to serve there. Later the vicar of Wendy had been paid a pittance to attend and take services. Not that there was much to do: one marriage had been solemnised in 1716 but no marriages, baptisms or burials conducted there afterwards.

No it had been due to politics. Lord Sandys had continue to pay the Wendy vicar £20 to preach but stopped after the vicar offended his lordship by voting the wrong way at an election. Now the few inhabitants tramped to Wendy for their religious needs

It was time for Plumptre and his companion to make their way too, though only after agreeing they would return for a glass of ale at some future occasion when they came for a voyage up the river. The miller directed them through the fields towards a wood called Clobber's grove and their next port of call, Guilden Morden.

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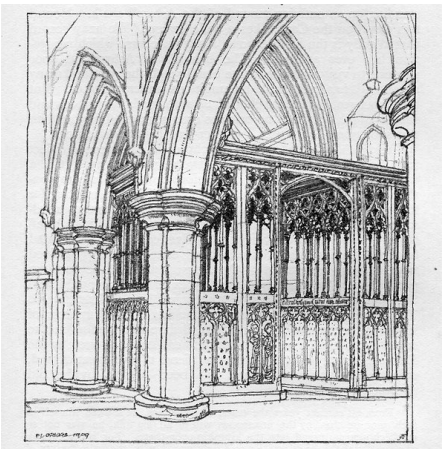
James Plumptre had reached Guilden Morden as the sun was reaching its peak on that June day of 1800. He noted in his expedition journal how he had stopped to view the church, a large and handsome building but not one that was greatly used. The vicar lived miles away at Dunstable and left a curate to look over both the Mordens, Guilden and Steeple, with a singe service alternating morning and afternoon at each. But few went to church when the bell rang, some claiming they had difficulty in remembering which week it was and when the service would be held.



Rood Screen, Guilden Morden Church.

The vicarage was in a poor condition and certainly not suitable for a clergyman-fellow from Jesus College. But there had since been a revival, Elliott Smith interjected. After John Raworth was appointed he'd renovated the building and moved in, boosted the congregation to about 250 people and severely dented the number of dissenters. After his death however things had gone back to the old ways. The current curate, Thomas Clack, lived in lodgings at Litlington as he was too poor to afford furniture, or even a servant. But he was a supporter of Frederick Maberly's views on the iniquity of the new poor laws and had taken part in the confrontation outside Royston workhouse, when plans to storm the building and rip it down stone by stone had been frustrated by heavy rain.

When Elliot Smith had accompanied the Charity Inquiry men in the 1830s they'd found the church had been repaired with to an annual grant of £12 from money received from the rent of the town lands – something that was bound to cause resentment. But generally the charities were well conducted, not only giving relief for needy people but also doling out coal to the widows. Virtually all the residents were farm labourers, they worked in the fields when they were fit and laboured in the four-bedded village workhouse when they were not. However

five years ago there'd been a nasty incident after the overseer had withheld payment to one of the parish poor since he refused to do the work demanded. The man had then taken revenged by setting fire to the overseer's property.

The charity had exchanged the 45-acre allotments they'd been awarded at enclosure for a smaller plot nearer the village and now 43 labourers were making use of them. This was one benefit of the process that had been grinding on when Plumptre visited. It had first been proposed for Guilden Morden in 1796 but had been delayed as landowners would not agree to make a payment in lieu of the tithe, arguing that the commons had not paid this previously and they weren't going to start now. Finally the Act had passed including a proposal for a new common pasture for cattle; but villagers had managed to frustrate it by choosing to take separate allotments instead.

This was border territory, Plumptre had noted in his journal; not far from Hook's watermill was a spot called 'Labour in Vain' where Cambridgeshire, Bedfordshire and Hertfordshire join and a man could tread in three counties at the same time. The intrepid duo followed the intricate windings of the Cam to reach Ashwell in time for dinner only to find the pub undergoing repair though the landlord allowed them to feast on pigs fry in the kitchen

Here they were joined by another traveller walking from Newport to Biggleswade. He had stopped on his way to get some beer, but had chosen unwisely and it had turned sour on his stomach. Fortunately for him Plumptre's travelling companion, Walter Trevilyan was both a chemist and physician and prescribed some Hartshorn and water, an alkali to correct the acid, which did him good. Afterwards they adjourned to Ashwell church from the top of which they enjoyed an extensive view over the Wimpole pavilion to Cambridge and the Gogmagog Hills to the north and towards the great mansion of Woburn to the south. But it was something inside the church that caught Plumptre's attention: an extract from Acts of Parliament passed in 1553 and 1689 fixing the penalty for interrupting a clergyman during a service at three month's imprisonment and a fine of £250. This hinted at some disturbance which might be worth investigating. But for now it was time for the final part of their expedition to the source of the Cam.

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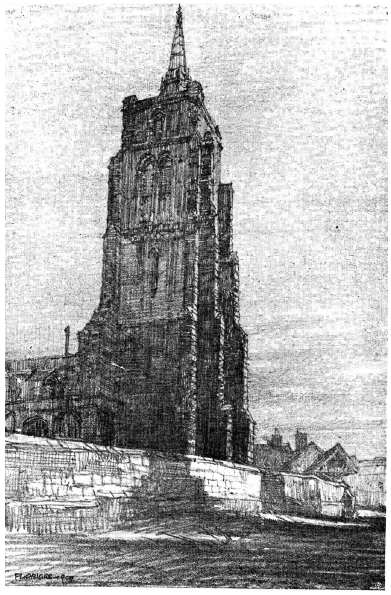

Ashwell Church from the N.W.

It was time for the intrepid duo to reach journeys end. The Ashwell parish clerk led Plumptre and Trevilyan to a sunken amphitheatre some 100 yards in length and ten in depth, its sides covered with brushwood and overshadowed by ash trees. All around the floor the infant river Cam bubbled up from not less than between 30 and 40 springs. It was a precocious baby for within 200 and 300 yards was being used to power a watermill.

Nearby stood the remains of an ancient house belonging to the Baldwyn family which had only been pulled down within the last 30 years. The site was still clearly visible and one could see where a spring rose up under the kitchen floor.

But, Plumptre noted, the place was very much overrun with weeds. Were it to be cleared and a little pains taken to keep it in order, then the source of the Cam would be a very curious and pleasing spot. As it was only the landlord of the adjacent Three Tuns seemed to have any interest in promoting it, claiming that it contained

prehistoric worms that if properly cultivated could become an important source of income for the village.

But who would wish to linger in such a spot, for its very church bore witness to trials and tribulations. Etched deep in the stone of the tower was a Latin inscription beginning 'Pestilentia Maesta Cruenta Miseranda'. Plumptre translated it for his companion as: "A mournful pestilence, cruel, deplorable, fierce and calamitous. The common people who survived were a most deplorable witness. At last came a furious wind. In this year on St Maurice's Day thunders through the world, 1361'.

It was time to move on before thunder returned and there was somewhere that Plumptre wished particularly to visit now that he was in the vicinity. They struck out steadily towards Gamlingay and reached the Cock at about 8 o'clock.

He explained to his companion: "This is the first Church I ever did duty in. I was ordained by the Bishop of Ely on Palm Sunday, April the 13th 1794. The Bishop had undertaken to provide a curate for Mr Turno (who was in a very unhappy state and unable to take care of it himself) and desired me to take it for a short time. I accordingly accepted it, and on the Friday following, being Good Friday, I did duty for the first time. I went over on the Thursday and staid over till Sunday at the Public House. I kept the curacy a quarter of a year, and had the pay been better and the distance less, I should have liked much to have continued it".

He was particularly keen to call on Mr William Parsons who lived in a farm close–by where he used to sleep on his journies from Cambridge hither to do duty. Unfazed by the unexpected visitors Parsons regaled them with a glass of his (or rather his sister's) currant wine, which had not degenerated in its flavour since Plumptre tasted it last. The former curate escorted the man beck to the public house to eat his bread and cheese with them and shared reminiscences until late. Then, leaving Treviliyan to sleep at the pub, Plumptre resumed his ancient station in the blue-checked bed at his former lodgings.

Next morning he rose early and took his friend to see the great wonder of Gamlingay, the weeping ash tree. The only natural one known in the Kingdom, perhaps in the world, it grew in the vicarage garden and was older than the memory of the oldest man in the parish. By June 1800 it was 31 foot high and 40 across. But all efforts to propagate it had proved ineffectual, as cuttings, even if they thrived, do not weep.

The two friends returned to the Inn, breakfasted in a room with the folding doors open to the street and pondered where to go next. Their decision was to have a major impact on the life of the perambulating parson.

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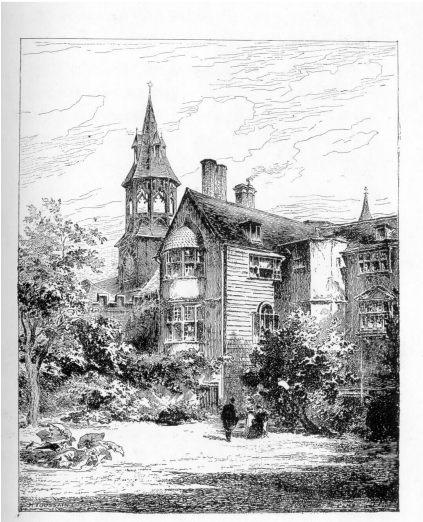

THE LODGE OF
QUEENS' COLLEGE.

John Bowtell had known James Plumptre, the pedestrian don, for many years. He had been amongst those in the congregation back in June 1815 to see him launched into matrimony at the advanced age of 44 to a bride only marginally younger. She had not been his first choice but Miss Morris would have nothing to do with a man with little money behind him and with no obvious sign of a promising career.

But then James Plumptre's life had not been one of unbridled success. He had been born well enough, third son of the President of Queens' College, with seven sisters to spoil him. He had the benefit of the

Earl of Hardwicke of Wimpole Hall as a family friend and with such a start should have been destined for greatness. Indeed the path had already been mapped out.

His mother's relations ran a public school in Hackney to which the Plumptres had immediate admission; his father, being President, ensured that there would be no problem of a Fellowship at Queens' and then once the lad was ordained the college had a number of wealthy livings which would comfortably support both him, a wife and numerous progeny as he worked up to a Bishopric or Mastership of his own.

Things had gone wrong early in the cycle. James had not got settled into his college studies before his father died. The new President, Isaac Milner, was no supporter of his predecessor. He brought in his own team of tutors and made life so unpleasant that for the first time in his pampered life James Plumptre had to take independent action. He had packed up his gown and mortarboard and stolen away from his college and the memories it evoked for him; he found a warmer welcome down the road at Clare Hall. Having proved he had a will of his own he awaited the reading of his father's.

There again he was doomed to disappointment. For although Robert Plumptre had taken full advantage of his position to secure a number of clerical livings that brought in a good income, although he had picked up a Professorship in Moral Theology and a couple of spells as Vice Chancellor, the fact was that he had also acquired too large a family. He had seen his first two sons well launched, provided a good income for his widow and the five unmarried daughters but had just not had time to acquire enough ready money for James as well.

However he had left him with powerful friends one of whom was the Bishop of Ely – another member of the Hardwicke family – and with such backing a Fellowship at Clare was assured. Now he was qualified for a country vicarage, if only he could find one. Sadly his new college had few that were suitable; he had stood in for the vicar of Gamlingay but that really had not paid well enough. Then in 1797 he was appointed to Hinxton. The previous minister, James Nasmith had spent years compiling a catalogue of the ancient manuscripts donated by Archbishop Parker to St Bene'ts College and had hoped it would have earned him the Mastership there. His frustration at being passed over was tempered by his promotion by the Bishop to that most wealthy of livings, Leverington.

James Plumptre hoped to follow in his footsteps. Hinxton wasn't too bad a first step in a clerical career; it was quite near Cambridge, the church wasn't in too bad a state and there was another new boy in the shape of the squire, Edward Chapman Green at Trout Hall with its library, fish ponds and stables. Together they formed a Friendly Society, organised gardening competitions and tried to frustrate the grown of Methodism. In this, as in much else, Plumptre was disappointed; out of a population of over 250 he only managed to attract 20 regulars to his sermons. His hope of a peaceful life was shattered by a brutal rape on one of his parishioners; he guided her through the trauma of

the trial and had the satisfaction of hearing the perpetrator sentenced to death, only to have to explain why the man should have been reprieved. Then his friend the squire died unexpectedly. It was the greatest shock James had ever experienced; he quit Hinxton and headed back to Clare.

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The period from 1797 to 1799 had been an exciting one for the Reverend James Plumptre. Secure in his living at Hinxton he'd walked to North Wales, Derbyshire, Yorkshire and then in the May of 1799 he had found himself on the borders of Scotland.

He crossed at Cornhill, a small village where, 'at a public house at the farther end of the bridge marriages are performed, the ceremony performed by some blacksmith or alehouse keeper'. Here he observed a curious notice over a shop door. It read: 'Travelling caps and boys of all kind sold here'. He noted 'As I was not in want of a son and heir I did not go in'. But some later speculated that this might indeed have been his purpose.

Plumptre strode on to Galashiels where he'd had a dirty wet bedroom and dined on poor broth and the scrag end of a neck of mutton. Edinburgh beckoned next day; he strolled past castles and golf courses till he reached the old town then on to Rumbling Bridge, waterfalls and all the other charms the country had to offer, hiring guides as he went, until he reached Kenmore. Here he met with a civil landlady and, overcome with toils and heat of the day, fell unto a profound sleep after dinner.

Next morning he found that the landlady had engaged a woman to guide him. With her he visited the Temple of Venus before returning to find a penny wedding in progress at the inn. 'When the bride and bridegroom cannot afford to treat their friends, the friends treat them, paying so much a head for their entertainment, the profits of which often leaves them a pretty penny wherewith to set out in the world' he noted. Afterwards there was dancing till two in the morning and the whisky flowed. 'It was more like the ceremonies in a pagan temple of Venus, or Bacchus, than a wedding in a Christian country', he jotted. But by next morning something had changed. He decided to abandon his plans to stride on to Oban and the western isles and return home.

He recorded his journey in a poem he entitled 'The Pedestrian: a Highland eclogue'
"Is not the country round one's peaceful home,
Dearer than richer scenes for which we roam?
Sad was the hour, and luckless was the day
When first from Hinxton cot I bent my way"

His verse continues in like vein, recording the hazards of travel – the silent flea who bites at night, or 'some gaunt gnat will hum my head around'. It was indeed a hardship to travel, who could deny that home was best. If he's stopped his poem here nobody would have questioned it. But it was the concluding verses that got people wondering:

Ah hapless youth! For she thy love hath won,
The tender Clara will be most undone.
Big swell'd my heart and own'd the powerful maid
When fast she drops her tears as thus she said
'Farewell the youth, whom sighs could not detain,
Whom Clara's breaking heart implores in vain.
Yet as thou goest may ev'ry blast arise
Weak and unfelt as these rejected sighs.

Safe o'er the wilds no perils may'st thou see,
No griefs endure; nor weep, false youth, like me'.
O let me safely to the fair return,
Say with a kiss she must not, shall not mourn,
O let me teach my heart to lose its fears,
Recall's by wisdom's voice and Clara's tears
He said and call'd on Heav'n to bless the day
When back to Hinxton cot he bent his way.

On his return he settled back into parochial life and the problems of ministering to the frailties of his congregation. Never again would he journey to distant places. But others noticed the arrival in Cambridge a few months later of a young Scottish lady who was seeking for a Cambridge don who she'd met a short time previously near her home at Oban. She'd walked all the way, no mean feat for a girl, especially a pregnant one. But nobody could, or would help her. She was told the fellow she was seeking was dead or 'unavailable'.

Her son, Samuel, was born in Cambridge and baptised privately; he took his mother's surname of Logan and later became a boatbuilder. His mother lived independently, well supported financially, until she married William Jolley, a thatcher in 1805 to whom she bore eight other children. By coincidence it was in 1805 that James Plumptre quit Hinxton and returned to his Cambridge College.

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The Reverend James Plumptre had tried to settle back into life at Clare College after his spell at Hinxton vicarage. He threw himself into his writing, producing discourses on the stage, composing poetry and songs, even calling on the expertise of Charles Hague the University Professor of Music to provide the tunes. But although several of his works were published and found their way into the University Library none achieved great critical acclaim.

He needed a new challenge, a new living, but Clare had few to offer. At last he was given his chance. He had first glimpsed Great Gransden village during his walking tour to the source of the Cam in 1800 when it had not warranted more than a few notes on its famous vicar, Barnabas Oley of Clare Hall. Twelve years later, aged 41, he returned as minister.

The journey out from Cambridge in his carriage seemed interminable but eventually in the gathering gloom his eyes perceived the stark outline of what appeared to be a gibbet. Surely he was now only a short distance from his destination, if he continued into Caxton village there must be some route to Gransden. Not so, he still had a long way to go. "Great Gransden is at the end of the world, and Little Gransden a quarter of a mile beyond" he was told. There was no road suitable for a carriage that way, he must continue on to Eltisley, then down towards Warseley before he could reach his journey's end. Walkers and horsemen could cut across the fields from Caxton if they knew the way, though many got lost en route. Plumptre resolved to try to persuade the parish to erect a white way post halfway between the two villages, visible from each. He was to fail.

As he finally approached Gransden his heart sang, and so did the bells of the church for they played a tune every three hours day and night. It was to the strains of 'Harvest Home' that he

reached the parish where he was to spend the rest of his days. His first impression of the village was a collection of run-down thatched cottages, but there was his new church and alongside it the handsome brick-built vicarage which was to be his new home. He quickly found that it had been neglected by an absentee vicar for the previous seventeen years and was truly in a lamentable state with clear evidence that pigs had been kept in the basement. It would take a great deal of expensive repair. He had to commission Charles Humfrey of Cambridge to put it in order at a cost of £600, substituting square windows for original round-headed ones and adding a porch at the front door. It was the spring of 1813 before it was fit for occupation and Plumptre could arrange for his final removal from Clare.

The church of St Bartholomew was also 'not in that state of decency and neatness becoming the house of God though in a country village'. He drew up plans to whitewash the walls, repaint the commandments and other inscriptions and construct a vestry where he could change during the service. But nobody would come to services if they were cold so he sought permission to block up the arch of the west end between the body of the church and the belfry. All this needed the agreement of his churchwardens. They were happy to provide new service books and repair old ones – and here John Bowtell, bookbinder, had been able to offer them a good deal. But they were unwilling to repair the fabric and it took seven long years before the archdeacon approved his ideas.

A vicar also needed the support of a wife. James' New Year's resolution for 1814 was, 'I will look out for an Help meet for me'. He commenced a flurry of tea engagements with a Miss Morris but at the end of the year he was forced to report of his resolution: 'Unsuccessful'. By the next spring, however, he had better luck. He called on Elizabeth Robinson and made a proposal of marriage; it was accepted. They married on 6 June 1815 in All Saints church opposite Trinity College, when he was nearly forty-four and she nearly forty-five. She was no great beauty, nor did she bring a fortune to her marriage bed but at least he was wed at last and could concentrate on his pastoral duties.

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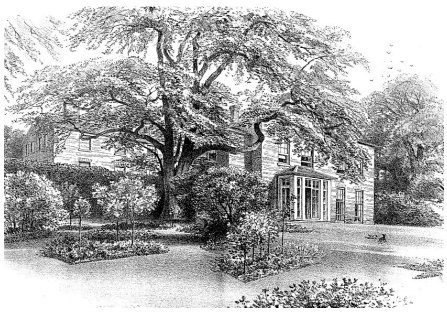
Out in the Huntingdonshire countryside the Rev James Plumptre was finding that parish life was far from being a bed of roses. Although one churchwarden, J. Wright was on his side the other, James Spring, opposed him on every occasion and annoyed him in every way, withholding his tithes and turning his pigs into the churchyard. On more than one occasion he was forced to take Spring to court as when he asserted his rights to appoint the parish clerk, a position that carried an annual allowance of 40 shillings. But Plumptre sought to build bridges with is fellow churchman; once he met Spring in the blacksmith's shop and handed him back the money for which they had been contending, saying 'I do not want your money … I only wanted to show you that I was claiming my right'.



He jotted down his private observations on his troublesome warden in his notebook: 'A quarrelsome man in a parish, especially if he have got a little smattering of law is like a cholic in the gut' and 'No fox so cunning but he comes to the furrier at last'. He was a long time waiting, for his great protagonist finally died in October 1827 at the ripe of age of 93.

Plumptre explored his parish. There was a pound for straying cattle and pigs but in 1819 it was agreed to erect a cage for errant parishioners as well. It was a small brick building with a tiled roof and a stout oak door which had an iron grating in so one could inspect the inmates.

It wasn't just men who were imprisoned. One lad complained to him: "There was a lot of big boys, servants and such, making a row in the street and Spring - 'King' Spring we call him - was passing and wanted to stop the row. But he dared not touch the big boys – some of them were horsekeepers – so he catched hold of me. I told him I'd done nothing but he said he'd make an example of me – and then I kicked he's shins and didn't I make his old boots rattle! Then he called old Hall and I clattered and clawed his face, but they put me in the cage and locked me up. Then my father came and he said to Spring 'if you don't let my boy out I'll take my mattick and peck ye down' and old Drury got a plough-helve and snapt the lock and it fell in the ditch and I got out". Nearby stood the stocks, one of the posts of which served as a whipping post. Here Plumptre watched impotently while two boys who'd robbed an orchard were whipped on their bare backs till the blood flowed.

The village school had been built in the 1600s and comprised one large room whose walls were adorned with framed scripture texts written longhand. Along the middle of ran a long table desk, flat on top with slanting sides at which the scholars sat on forms. There were six fixed seats like church pews on each side of the room. The Master's desk was on a dais though he was often to be found in a small sleeping room by the door. George Drury had been schoolmaster for ten years until he became deranged and left to become the village baker instead. The master was paid £20 a year to teach a dozen boys to read and write. He got another £10 for teaching 12 Little Gransden children to read - though they had to pay if they wanted to write as well. It was 5½d a week for reading but 9d for the full three 'r's of reading, writing and arithmetic. There was an additional charge of two shillings for firing in the winter. School hours were supposed to be from eight until noon and half-past one till half-past four, although often he shut up early. There was another school at Lt Gransden where children could be educated for free but the schoolmaster had a violent temper and left the teaching to his 14-year-old son.

Despite this few of the children could read or write. As soon as boys were big enough they were taken out of school to lead the horses necessary for working the heavy land. Plumptre tried to establish a Sunday School but was opposed by both Spring and the other farmers. Not to be beaten he funded one himself in the summer of 1814, and found an unexpected ally to run it.

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Alone and almost friendless in an isolated Huntingdonshire parish, the Rev James Plumptre found a supporter in the village butcher, Thomas Lantaffe. Thomas had been born at Croxton to respectable parents; his father was a schoolteacher who sent him to a boarding school at St Neots for a while. There he developed a loving for books and learning, but his was too delicate a constitution for the academic life. So his father apprenticed him to a Cambridge butcher. Here he was well-fed until after four years he was ready to strike out on his own. It was in the spring of 1801 that he came to Great Gransden to live with his sister, only to find that a return to the rigours of country life confined him to bed for six months.

As his health recovered so his business flourished, but he retained his love of reading; somebody lent him a copy of the *Church of England Magazine* and he became a regular subscriber, even seeking out back copies until he had a complete file. The sheep slaughterer and the new shepherd of the Gransden flock met when Plumptre lodged with the family whilst waiting for his vicarage to be made habitable. As Thomas's journeys took him to Cambridge market once a week the two shared the journey on the butcher's cart, their conversation ranging from butchery to religion.

Plumptre confessed to his new friend that he was facing a crisis: he was soon due to be formally inducted to his new living and next day the Bishop of Lincoln was to hold a confirmation service at St Neots. Somehow he had to find suitable candidates; he had one in the person of one of his churchwardens who had reached the grand old age of 61 without being confirmed, now he persuaded the 32-year-old butcher to be another. After that there was no looking back; almost every Sunday Thomas the butcher was there in the congregation, one of the first to get to his knees for the prayers, the most attentive of the listeners and a teacher in the Sunday School.

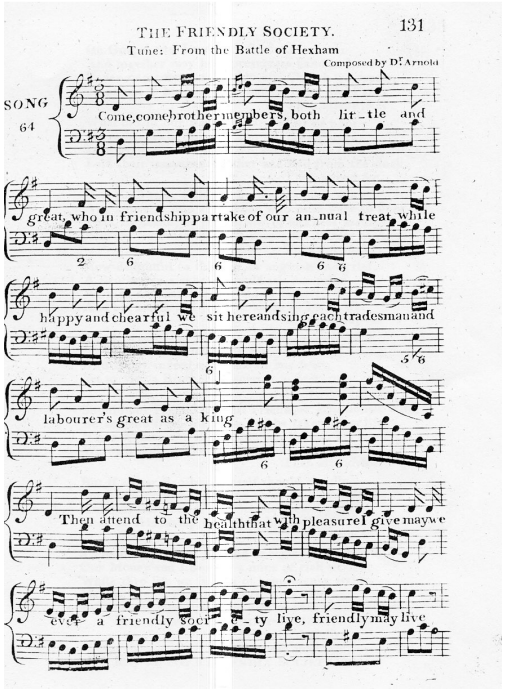
Plumptre was a fervent supporter of Friendly Societies; he had established one at his previous parish of Hinxton and had even composed a song about it

What tho in our means we are all of us poor
Yet each, weekly, lays by him a little in store;
Like good Christians of old, who, as one friendly flock,
Laid their treasures together and liv'd from the stock.

How delightful to think, if, in anguish and grief,
A Brother, in sickness, should ask our relief
We visit his mansion our aid to impart,
And bid health and joy live again in his heart.

Should our Friend's dearest Friend, an affectionate Wife,
Be snatch'd from his arms, and be taken from life,
If our Money and Friendship can lighten his care,
We, with both, to the sorrowing Husband repair.

But if a dear Brother himself should e'er die,
For his Widow and Orphans we've still a supply'
And this last debt of love let his memory crave,
That, in Friendship, we follow his corpse to the grave.



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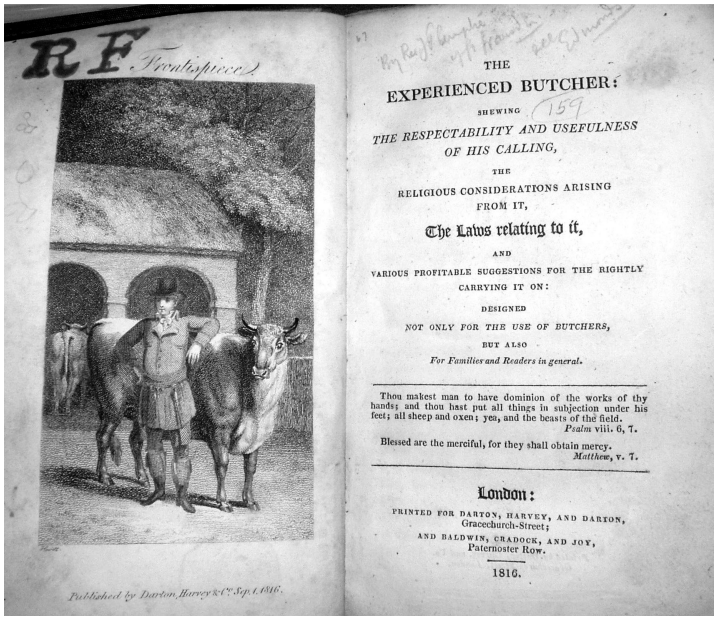
Out at Great Gransden both the Reverend James Plumptre and butcher Thomas Lantaffe had a love of books. But while the butcher read, the parson wrote – or rather he rewrote what others had written before him, making subtle improvements and removing any passages that he felt offensive. The two men collaborated on a book of their own. 'The Experienced Butcher', issued in 1816 brought together Thomas Lantaffe's practical skills with James Plumptre's ability to plunder and transcribe sections from other published work to provide a unique volume. There were already such compilations to aid the rat-catcher, housewife, confectioner and parish-officer, this would fill a gap and perhaps make both of them rich. But as with all of Plumptre's other literary efforts it found few readers – except in Great Gransden.

It was at Lantaffe's suggestion that a Book Society was established in the village in August 1813. It soon attracted eighteen members who met once a fortnight and paid sixpence each, money that was used to purchase religious and useful books that went round the subscribers and were then divided among them. The society continued for six-and-a-half years, during which nearly £50 was paid out for over 230 books, but numbers dropped off and at the end there were only three still paying their way. The best book of all was, to parson and butcher alike, the Holy Bible and both travelled to Caxton to attend meetings of the Bible Society. Other people not used to books of any kind wondered what amusements could be found in

them, but books were company and good books good company; what's more books helped while away the long dark nights when the only other companionship would be found in one of the village alehouses.



Not that Lantaffe was a stranger to the alehouse; he could not be, he was a butcher. On his journeys to Cambridge he stopped at the Black Swan in the Butcher Market, kept by Mr Smith, where eight other butchers and two tanners were frequently to be found. In such company bad language was to be expected and the inn kept a swearbox fining the foul-mouthed sixpence a curse. The box was invariably empty except on one occasion when the transgressor was a visitor!

Thomas's travels took him to various village inns and even in the village his shop was some distance from the house in which he lodged. So the nearest public house became his home yet although he enjoyed his pint he was never drunk. Which was more than could be said for other villagers. The vicar had to break up a disorderly scene in one pub, where the beery voices of the regulars insisted that they 'did not care a pin' for him and 'would come there for all any parson or bishop'

But the vicar himself was almost driven to drink by his wife! For his marriage, like his parish, brought its trials and disappointments. She suffered from rheumatism, nettle rash and the blister and was often too ill to go to church. Even if his wife was unable to attend church their staff needed to be there. But one Sunday as the cook was sitting in her pew she remembered that the vicar was to have had sausage dumpling for dinner and she'd forgot to put the dumpling in the pot to boil. She did not dare to go out of church herself so she sent James, the footman, to remedy her error. The vicar was not pleased: "Never do that again. I would much rather have no dinner at all than that you should disturb the congregation in that unseemly manner"

Such rebukes prompted the servants to spread tales of quarrels over domestic affairs, of 'very insulting' comments at the dinner table and how his wife talked of going away. On the anniversary of their wedding day in 1822 James went to his church were he read the Marriage service over - and prayed. Perhaps the prayers worked: the couple resumed their social round, drinking tea with the parishioners, receiving visitors, going to market in Huntingdon and St Ives, and taking occasional trips to Cambridge and London. They even purchased a pony chaise which caused much brief excitement until it was abandoned after the pony insisted on going downhill too fast, and their life became increasingly confined to the parish.

Although confined to his parish the Reverend James Plumptre found much to keep him busy. He set out to make a census of all his flock, not just the troublesome ones.

First on his list were the village mansions. Great Gransden Hall, a substantially-built residence with drawing room, dining room, library and six principal bedrooms was occupied by Thomas Quintin whose father had made his money as a glass manufacturer in London and had also bought Little Gransden Manor in 1786. He had been one of the promoters of the Inclosure Act for that parish and suffered the consequences when with the ending of the Napoleonic War the price of land had collapsed. The long-drawn out process and the heavy cost of fencing added to his problems. Like other landowners he could not afford his share of the expenses and was glad in 1815 to be able to let some of his lands for only 7s. 6d. Quintin saw his income from Little Gransden reduced from £600 to £60 and by 1819 was compelled to lay down all his servants and carriages. He sold up his Great Gransden Hall in 1827 and moved to his other estate at Hatley. The new owner was Benjamin Dealtry, a Yorkshireman, who moved south having been separated from his wife, bringing his daughters with him. The other large estate, Reppington manor or Priory Farm owned by Major Campbell had been valued in February 1825 at £13,000 plus another £1,000 for the timber. Mr Quinton offered £11,000 for the lot, a price that was rejected. It was not a wise move and was finally purchased by Dr William Webb in May 1830 for less than £9,000. Webb was Master of Clare Hall who also leased the vicar of Great Gransden's Little Gransden property.

The vicar's visits took him to numerous old thatched lathe and plaster cottages; some privately owned, others rented. He sympathised with Thomas Bannister who had owned his own house until he lost it in a lawsuit to Mr Chapman, a Biggleswade attorney and also learned of the battle that Simon Mason had fought some years earlier. Mason had been born in the village where his ancestors had lived upwards of 300 years, one of the most ancient families in the county. He had been a pensioner at Clare Hall then graduated to Lincoln's Inn and after being called to the bar he returned to his seat at Gransden and practised as barrister at Law. But despite his legal training he had been involved in a boundary dispute with Emmanuel College which he had lost.

Other parishioners lost their homes through acts of God. In December 1827 fire raged through a considerable part of the village; thanks to the active exertions of the residents and a plentiful supply of water it was checked after four hours but four cottages were entirely burnt down and one or two others damaged. It was for occasions such as this that firehooks were kept at the church to pull burning thatch from blazing roofs.

Then there were the poorest of all, the 16 or 17 people in the village almshouse. They included William Stearn and four children, James Pedley with six more and John Cade a blacksmith who worked at Toft. His wife Elizabeth was at times out of her mind and kept chained up: an object of mingled terror and wonderment to the children who were in turn a terror to her. She'd be kept the three weeks or a month and then let out again when she was better. The farmers used to send her food, one day or another.

Many parishioners had to seek parochial relief at the monthly Vestry Meetings. In September 1818 Charles Jakes had appealed: 'I am sorry to trouble you, but I am in the greatest distress. I have had nothing this nine weeks which it is impossible for me to do any longer, unless you allow me the two shillings a week as you did consider. Gentlemen, what price everything is at. Bread 17 pence a quartern loaf and everything else according so I hope you will be so good as to send me something as I am unable to earn anything'. At the same meeting Sarah Medlock asked the parish to employ her boy and Elizabeth Darling appealed for some help in the expense of burying her's. At other times the lads fended for themselves.

There was an additional supplement to the income of some Great Gransden parishioners: on Plough Monday a group of men and boys decked with ribbons went round the village with a decorated plough, stopping at all the main houses to demand money reciting:
Remember us poor plough boys;
A ploughing we must go:
Hail, rain, blow or snow,
A ploughing we must go.
Payment was not compulsory but it was wise to honour the tradition.

Then on May Day a garland of flowers was hung across the road from the smithy to the bakehouses and young folk went round singing
Awake ye maidens all,
And take your May-Bush in
For in the morn, should it be gone,
They'll say we brought you none.
There was another important part of the calendar which was looked forward to even more: the ceremony of beating the bounds. A party consisting of the vicar, Mr Plumptre, the church wardens, overseers and others, went in procession – 'Cessioning' – round the parish and stopped at certain places to sing the old 100th psalm. To ensure that the more important of the the parish bounds stayed the more strongly in the memories of the by-standers it was customary to dig a hole at certain spots and to take up the vicar bodily and put his head into it!

The Rev Plumptre was not afraid to poke fun at himself: he was kind to animals and once remonstrated with Ephraim Crane for using a horse somewhat roughly, declaring:"Animals will always treat you as you treat them". But Ephraim did not agree and told him so. Sometime afterwards the vicar presented himself at the smithy with his coat-tails torn off: "You are right: animals do not always treat you as you treat them. See what my pony has done to me and yet I have always treated him with the greatest kindness"

All this the vicar jotted down in his notebooks and journals which together with his songs and sermons, plays and publications soon amounted to a considerable collection. As he grew older and became more frail he started to agonise about quite what would happen to it all once he had passed away. He was all too aware how valuable papers could be lost. So he had revived his friendship with John Bowtell the bookbinder turned librarian and sought his help in ensuring that his lifetime's output should be preserved for prosperity in the Cambridge University Library. He agonised over the wording of his will, not forgetting to ensure his widow would be well looked after financially. Then once all the arrangements had been made, he died.

James Plumptre was buried in the chancel of the church where he had preached. The service paused whilst the church clock chimed the tune Marlbrook that he had added to those that rang out night and day thanks to the generosity of the other great Clare College incumbent, Barnabas Oley in the 1600s. But he did not rest in peace.

His widow Elizabeth moved away from their old home taking with her the vicarage knocker which she fixed to the door of her new abode. She died in May 1837 and was buried alongside the church. James's body was removed from his resting place inside to join her for eternity, though many felt he would have been happier to stay on his own beside the altar. His papers remained tucked away in his study – apart from a number of his diaries which somehow disappeared – perhaps censored by his widow. The rest would be sent to the University Library as soon as the new incumbent, Frederick LeGrice, had finished looking through them – at least Bowtell hoped so.

From his vantage point in the upper windows of Trinity Hall Pickwick had a view of the rear of the college of Gonville and Caius. Its founder John Caius had been a great book collector – a subject close to the heart of John Bowtell who secretly coveted the treasures housed in the college library. One of them was a history of shellfish – which started Bowtell on a fishy story that he was sure would amuse. But before he could get into his account of how a cod had been found on a Cambridge fishmarket stall with a book in its belly Pickwick told him he had heard it just a few days before from the Linton carrier. There were also Hebrew and Greek manuscripts on medical subjects beautifully written on vellum as well as Caius' own history of Cambridge – the one with the map engraved by Richard Lyne, Pickwick interjected, only to realise that he was running the risk of becoming an annoyance to his new friend.

It would not do to get too familiar, especially when talking about Caius' college, for the founder had wished strict protocol to be observed. He had ruled that all members of the college were to attend chapel daily but those of different degrees were to sit separately lest too great a familiarity should grow up amongst them. There was another rule that prohibited the admission of those who were deaf, dumb, deformed, invalid or – worst of all - Welshmen.

Having attended Gonville Hall Dr Caius had returned to his old college in 1559 only to find it in a state of decay, the buildings damaged by storms, wind and rain. So he had applied his personal fortune to repairing it. He erected an iron grating to keep animals out and bought from Henry Cromwell, grandfather of Oliver, a heap of stone that had formed part of Ramsey Abbey. He build three gates; Humility through which a student should enter humbly, Virtue as a pointer to the kind of life he should lead and Honour through which he passed on the way to receive his degree. But he left one side open to let in fresh air and, to ensure hygiene, ordered that the bed-linen was to be put out to air in the court. Amongst his appointments was that of a healthy, unmarried man aged forty or over whose job was to clean and sweep the pavement, fining anybody dropping litter and forbidding anybody from climbing on the college roof. Some mocked his excessive concern for cleanliness but Caius had been physician to Edward III and both Mary and Elizabeth and he knew what he was talking about.

When he died in London he was bought to Cambridge in solemnity, his body being met near Trumpington ford by senior and junior members of the University and conducted with the greatest funeral pomp to his college where he was buried in the chapel. Before his death he had given orders that his grave was to be made under the altar on the north side and this was carried out. But his body was disturbed when the chapel was rebuilt 150 years later. It was found to be whole and perfect, his beard very long. The then Professor of Anatomy took the opportunity to made a cast of his skull which is still displayed above his tomb. There was nothing unseemly in this, for Caius was a physician keen to enhance anatomical studies and had obtained permission for the college to receive two bodies of felons each year for dissection. Any bits that remained were to be prayed over by the students at St Michael's church across the road.

The college had another claim to fame: its gardens. Though landlocked in the heart of the town the Master had a garden, the Fellows an orchard and the court nearest the street was handsomely planted with lime trees – though unkind folk might observe they were somewhat starved and stifled. Although the courts were small they were beautiful with roses, lily of the valley, jessamine and a fine acacia as well as mulberry and figs waving beneath the chapel windows. The very college walls were dressed in ivy, complementing the ancient buildings for although there had been some modernisation Caius had not yet gone in for wholesale restructuring, though it had acquired old houses on the Senate House Hill in 1782 to give itself space to expand in the future.

Even though the University had its Senate House for official ceremonies there was still one tradition that continued to be held in the chancel of Great St Mary's church on the Friday before the Feast of St Simon and St Jude – towards the end of October:

It was known as the Magna Congregato or Black Leet Assembly and John Bowtell explained what happened. The Mayor was ordered to summon two aldermen, four burgess and two inhabitants from every parish to be present. Then at the due time the University Vice-Chancellor, Proctors, Registrary and Bedells proceeded in due solemnity to administer various oaths.

The Aldermen had to swear that they would 'diligently assist and faithfully counsel the Mayor and Bailiffs to keep the peace of both town and University and to search evil doers and vagabonds of the night and receivers of thieves and evil doers, so help them God'. Then the four bailiffs had to swear fidelity towards the Queen and promise to seek out those vagabonds, as ordered. Next the parish residents promised that if called upon they would make diligent and faithful search for all suspected persons every fortnight and hand them over to the Mayor. The words 'if called upon' were added within the last few years, but the aldermen and bailiffs don't have such an option.

The University's rights to summon them dated back to a charter from the time of Henry III. The ceremonies used to be held regularly but then fell into disuse until 1817 when Dr Webb became Vice Chancellor. At that time there had been a great influx of beggars and vagrants who infested the streets and colleges, giving serious cause for alarm. The University distributed a considerable sum of money to the parishes to keep such characters out of town and if the town officials didn't promise to do what was expected of them then the University would stop paying them the funds, he warned.

For some years after that the Mayor and councillors turned up but they didn't like it. Then in 1836, when Hovel was Mayor, he sent a note saying he'd been reading the old charters and couldn't find anywhere where it said he had to attend. So he wouldn't bother.

At this Dr Webb flew into a rage and Joseph Romilly, the University Registrary, had a devil of a job to persuade him to go and swear those people who did turn up. They in turn were annoyed to have been summoned – they were all Conservatives and felt they'd been forced to go by the Radical element of the council. Well the Vice-chancellor was in a sulk and wouldn't talk to them and it was left to the Proctors to take the oath. Then last year the Mayor did not show up again, nor did one of the four burgesses and five or six of the parishioners. Nobody seemed to bother: there was no asking whether they'd been summonsed and no attempt to fine them for non-attendance.

Now Charles Henry Cooper, who seems to be probing back into everything, is arguing that whatever use it was in the dim and distant past it is irrelevant in the modern age. These day no alderman or burgess ever takes the trouble of assisting or counselling the Mayor and Bailiffs and the Bailiffs rarely interfere in the maintenance of the peace. The parishioners are never called upon to make the search referred to and if they were they would probably refuse. Even if they complied they would find themselves summoned for trespass and then such an old charter would be very poor defence.

All in all it really is incredible that such an assembly should be conducted inside the walls of a building dedicated to sacred uses especially as recent legislation contains provisions specifically preventing such desecration. The next Black Assembly is due in a few week's time: it will be interesting to see whether anybody turns up this year.

Charles Henry Cooper was a man likely to go far. He'd been appointed coroner in 1836 as part of the massive shake-up in Cambridge local government that had seen the Duke of Rutland removed as High Steward and Henry John Gunning appointed in the place of Charles Howell as Town Clerk

Yet Cooper was only a young man, not then 30 years of age nor yet admitted a solicitor. The son of a Buckinghamshire solicitor he had come to the University in 1826 to study law and seemed to have a talent for learning. He was especially keen on history and the local area, indeed he had published a New Guide to Cambridge in 1831, though carefully ensuring that his name did not appear on the title page.

Now he was a regular in the University Library, which is where Bowtell had first met him. Indeed he was there so often, like some miraculously young ancient professor, that it was a wonder he ever found time to return to his home in New Square – or it was perhaps the presence of his young son, Thompson, that drove him out.

He was always researching some obscure fact or fancy, contributing notes and queries to the Gentleman's Magazine and other journals. But he was not one of those antiquarians to whom knowledge was power, he was always sharing it with anybody he met and constantly trying to assist them with their own research – even if they never acknowledged that assistance. Some could not believe his motives and many were suspicious of him, even regarding him as an enemy. He thrived on challenges: even after a hard day of legal studies would enjoy researching some obtuse problem first thing in the morning and last thing at night. The speed with which he rifled documents was startling, the driest catalogue had its charm supplying links in important chains of reasoning.

But not everybody viewed Charles Henry Cooper in the same light, as Elliott Smith pointed out. He was getting a reputation of being too thrusting for his own good and some councillors were out to get him.

In January he'd been in dispute over payment of the Gaol Rate, which he thought illegal. He was summonsed before the Mayor, Charles Humfrey, and Alderman Headley who asked him to state the reasons he should not pay. Then when he started quoting chapter and verse Humfrey accused him of being litigious and said he would rather live in a town with twenty mad dogs than listen to him. That riled Cooper who objected to the Mayor's language and accused him of being impertinent; he couldn't proceed if he was constantly interrupted.

He continued that no magistrate had the right to use insulting language however humble or criminal the offender may appear – and he was the Coroner and should expect even more courtesy. Then he went on to say it was notorious that Humfrey, inflated by his wealth and intoxicated by the possession of a little brief authority, deemed it beneath the dignity of a person of his extreme importance to pay the slightest regard to the feelings of others. It certainly perked up that day's business in court! Afterwards Cooper wrote to Humfrey demanding an apology or he'd complain to the council – Humfrey wrote back telling him to do as he d-mn-d well please!

When the council's in session you'll see Cooper sitting beside the Town Clerk – but why do meetings of the town council require the attendance of the coroner? Some say Cooper's just giving him the benefit of his knowledge but if Gunning is not up to the job, why was he appointed in the first place? He ought to be done away with and if Cooper is already doing the work for nothing, then he should be given the job. He'll need a new position soon if what they're saying about his work as coroner was right!

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Elliott Smith was no fan of Charles Henry Cooper, the coroner. The cost of running that department had shot up since he'd been appointed. In 1836 the coroner's bill had been £10, in 1837 it was up to £24 and this last year he'd submitted claims for over £135 16s.9d. It included charges for sending returns to the Secretary of State – but why was this being done by a coroner. Councillors were calling for a special committee to look into it – although every time they've looked into it in the past every item had been found correct.

It wasn't that there'd been a massive increase of suspicious deaths for the coroner to agonise over, although various odd people had died. Take John Barnes, who'd been employed for many years by Edward Litchfield, the fruiterer. He'd been well-known amongst the members of the university for his many eccentricities, amongst them he aversion to wearing a hat. But he'd lived till he was 72 and the only mystery was how had he gone on so long.

Another great character had been Deborah Willison, a 65 year old woman of very extraordinary habits. She had an income of £50 per year yet lived alone in a small house in Gold Street where she had no furniture except for a table, chair and three tea-chests on which she slept, with no covering other than a carpet. One night her neighbours, Mr & Mrs Tyler heard a noise and on looking through the window discovered the unfortunate creature sitting on the tea chests with her clothes in flames. She didn't attempt to move and they had to break down the door to get in. She was taken to hospital but obstinately refused either medicine or food, though she did take a considerable quantity of beer

Then there was poor Elizabeth Dannock, the 24-year old wife of a whitesmith in Portugal Place. She'd been washing her infant child by the fireside when flames communicated themselves to the back part of her dress. She had the presence of mind to thrust the infant from her but was herself severely burnt and died in hospital. Of course you expect deaths in hospitals, but the case of Mary Battell was different: she was a nurse at Addenbrooke's who'd been taken ill and confined to her bed. She recovered and went back to her ward to perform her usual duties. She'd just started when she was seized with a fit which carried her off in a quarter of an hour.

Sometimes doctors disagreed: Mary Rust was the wife of a chimney sweeper in Diamond Court, Regent Street. When she died a port-mortem was carried out by Mr Cribb, the workhouse surgeon, which left no doubt that death was due to natural causes. However Mr Catty, who'd been her medical attendant and was with her when she died, complained he should have been summonsed to give evidence as a medical witness – and claim expenses. But Cooper wouldn't call him - so he did save a little.

There's no doubt the coroner's job could be unpleasant. In June last year the gardener to Mr Hudson, cook of Trinity College, did not turn up for work for some days and was found bobbing about in the river near Sheep's Green. He was fully clothed with his hat thrust down to the nose. The body was greatly decomposed and much swollen, especially the face and head and there was a rope around the neck to which was attached a small piece of rag. It was too thin to have been used for hanging or strangulation and had probably been tied to a weight that had sunk the body. When the rope had rotted the corpse had floated to the surface. That same week the body of a woman from Sun Street, Barnwell was found in the river – that time the coroner's jury gave a verdict of insanity. There really ought to be somewhere that such bodies could be taken.

But the main body to have interested the council was that of a whale. It had been caught off Plymouth in 1831 when it weighed 200 tons and stretched for 102 feet. By the time it got to Parker's Piece, five years later, it was down to 85 feet in length and ponged a bit. It was

displayed so people could pass between its giant ribs. However it did not to prove as profitable an operation as the exhibitor hoped. For as he was about to pack up and leave the council slapped a three-guinea charge on him for parking on the Piece. When he refused to pay they called the police and fastened a rope around the caravan until he forked out.

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Charles Henry Cooper, Cambridge coroner and prospective town clerk, had married a fen girl, Elizabeth Thompson whose family came from Prickwillow. Now that was an isolated place that Elliott Smith, the auctioneer, did not care to visit. Deep in the fens beyond Ely it was an area that did not welcome strangers and certainly not one in which to invest.

He'd heard of a rich London merchant who'd inherited three farms in the Burnt Fen, beyond Prickwillow. After three years he decided to go and inspect his estate. He arrived at the time of flood when nearly three-quarters of his acres were covered in water. On his return home he described the remarkable sight to his wife who decided she must see it for herself. But her husband refused ever to go again and it took some time before she made the expedition. She got there when they were burning the surface of the peat and could see little else but smoke and flame over the whole domain. She went back to her husband with a vivid description of the scene, at which he got alarmed and put the whole of his 'Fire and Flood Farm' up for sale.

But this was not a safe place to hold an auction; a couple of years earlier Mr Cross of Ely had conducted a sale and then hired a room at a public house to finish off the paper-work. Shortly afterwards one of the purchasers arrived and demanded to see him. When being told he was busy the man threatened to knock down anybody who tried to stop him, burst in and then refused to leave. There was no option except to call the parish constable when a serious scuffle ensued. It ended with the constable somewhat battered and the purchaser arrested.

This was a community scattered over some seventeen square miles whose religious needs were served by two ministers, both of them minor canons at Ely Cathedral. It had no church and anybody wishing to marry was forced to travel to Ely, at least four miles distant. At least that wedding journey, wading through mud and filth, was a more pleasant affair than the burial of their dead.

The water table was so high that it was impossible to dig a hole without it filling up and nobody wanted to witness their loved one's body consigned to slub. So the coffin was placed on the back of a cart for the journey along fen droves. In dry weather when the ground was rock hard, the hooves and wheels kicked up clouds of choking dust. But in wet times they were virtually impassable with ruts three feed deep with mud forming stagnant pools that threatened the legs of horses and the wheels of carts. At least it jolted the corpse so violently that there was no doubt that it was indeed dead and not just dead drunk or drugged by an excess of poppy-head tea.

An application for a proper road back in 1831 had been turned down, as the maintenance costs would be prohibitive. So people took to the top of the riverbank. They were just wide enough for those on horseback but the journey was never pleasant. On a warm summer day the insects rose in swarms to bite or sting and there was no shelter when the wind blew howling across the fen from the wilds of Russia. With waters high in the river it only took a slight stumble from the horse to pitch both animal and rider into the dark, cold torrent.

Night was far worse; when the skies were as black as the fields, then you needed to know the way like the back of your hand. Soon you would come to a barrier across the bank but how

confident were you to attempt to jump it without knowing just how muddy the landing might be. The lanterns fixed to your stirrups gave only a meagre illumination but at least they gave warning of an approaching horseman. And this was the most worrying thing of all.

Just who would be out on such a dark night; would he be friend or villain? There was no way of knowing, as his light grew nearer. Then there was the difficult decision: who was to give way and risk that slippery slope on either side. It would only take a slight miscalculation, a sudden movement of a rat of fox to spook a horse, or a deliberate blow from a riding whip. And that would be the end: another body washed up by the side of the river or retrieved from between the bulrushes of a drain.

In the past the fenmen knew where the riverbanks went, but now the river itself had moved.

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The landscape to the north of Ely was being completely reshaped – and it was all down to Sir Myles Sandys. Pickwick had already committed that name to his notebooks. John Peck had told him of the controversial schemes he'd promoted to drain the fens, but that had been back in the 1600s. How could his spectre still be affecting life in the 1830s?

Elliott Smith explained: Its just because he was so unpopular. Back then it was obvious that something needed to be done to the river between Ely and Littleport. The best solution was a complete new channel and that was what the drainers proposed; it would be called Sandys cut after him. But the locals were adamant: they wanted nothing to do with any scheme linked to his name. Even when it was explained that the only alternative was to clean out the existing drains, and that would cost more than a complete new river, they were still determined. So the Great Ouse still made a sweep to the east to run all the way out to Prickwillow before winding back to Littleport.

Then in April 1826 there was a big meeting of the owners and occupiers of land in the area to discuss the benefits of straightening the river, which would speed the water and cut about six miles off the journey that the bargees had to make. They got an engineer, Mylne, to produce a scheme and he pointed out that it would also cut down the costs of maintaining the banks and bring a valuable tract of land into cultivation.

A South Level Drainage and Navigation Company was set up with the Mayor and Vice Chancellor among the commissioners and they appointed John Human of Prickwillow to supervise the work. He put together a gang of 200 men who set about digging a new river, 75 feet wide at the top, 50 feet wide and the bottom and six feet deep. Within two years they'd completed a narrow channel about half the distance so that they could take boats along it carrying the gault to make up the banks.

By April 1830 it was ready. The Commissioners called a meeting at the Lamb Inn, Ely, then formally opened the river by making a stately voyage in their barge through to Littleport, coming back for a dinner at the Lamb at four o'clock. It was a grand affair – well it ought to be, tickets for the meal cost fifteen shillings!

Of course the Poet Laureat of the fens, William Harrison, got in on the act and penned one of his odd odes talking about

… the glad exulting Ouse
Comes to wed his virgin spouse.
Long his streams have spent their force,
Winding in the serpents course;

Or with stagnant waters wide
Overflowed his swampy side.

Long has Padnal's dreary waste
Ely's neighbourhood disgraced;
Long her stately pile has frown'd
O'er the scene, desert and drown'd

But now

… the swain shall plough and sow
Where the fisher used to row:
Waving cornfields supersede
Swampy wastes of sedge and reed.

He recited it to the commissioners

While our barge so gaily glides
O'er the river's virgin tides,
And the music's melting strain
Floats along the liquid plain

There was no doubt the new river was a boon; they deserved their reward

Freely let the sparkling glass
Round the social circle pass,
Drowning in the generous bowl
Every care that racks the soul.

But perhaps its best achievement is that no longer do the bargees – or anybody else - need to go anywhere near Prickwillow! The strange thing is that Charles Henry Cooper – the Cambridge coroner – ended up marrying a Prickwillow girl whose father, as far as I can discover, was a publican out there. I often wonder whether it was the fenland drains that brought them together, Smith mused.

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The problems of getting to Prickwillow were nothing compared to the problems of getting to St Ives, as Elliot Smith explained.

The town was a major centre of the cattle trade; cows from Scotland, Ireland and the North of England were driven down to be rested and fattened on the commons before being sold at the market and taken on to Smithfield in London. Then there were the geese, thousands of them, that either waddled down or passed through on wagons, squawking and stinking as they went. If that wasn't enough there was an important fair, rivalling the Cambridge one at Stourbridge.

But its major asset was the great River Ouse. St Ives was a major distribution point for goods brought by river as this was as far as the fen boats could reach since watermills at Houghton and Hemingford Grey prevented them getting down to Huntingdon. It was also a major hub of road communications with links to Huntingdon, Somersham and Earith on the north side of the river and to Cambridge and Godmanchester to the south. This was by far the busiest route into the town but all this traffic had to cross the Great Ouse.

There'd been a bridge across the river at St Ives for as long as anybody could remember. It had started as a ford until a great stone bridge had been built by the monks. It had a chapel where the traveller could pray for a safe journey or give thanks for his safe arrival.

But to get to the bridge you had to cross the flood plain: land that was marshy, boggy and distinctly unpleasant. There was a raised causeway but even this was dangerous, especially for those driving herds of sheep or cattle to the market. Things got worse after Henry VIII had abolished the abbeys and in the mayhem that followed it was the Duke of Manchester who ended up owning both the bridge and the causeway leading to it. He put in a toll to pay for their maintenance, though folk from Fenstanton and the Hemingfords could use it for free, provided they carted gravel to make it up when required.

Smith had learned much of what happened next from a woman named Flanagan he'd met at Hemingford Abbots. Though if what he was told was actually true then it was a strange story indeed. The road got so bad, being cut up by all those cattle, that in the middle 1700's people obtained an Act of Parliament to establish a Turnpike Trust to maintain the route from Bury, near Ramsey, past Hilton, Eltisley, Gamlingay and Potton to meet the Great North Road at Stratton south of Biggleswade. They put in turnpike gates to raise money for improvements, including one at Hemingford and another at the Green End to the north side of St Ives.

But the old causeway belonged to the Duke of Manchester who already took a toll on the St Ives bridge to pay for its maintenance. The trouble was that it was impassable for long periods, traffic was stuck on either side of the river, causing chaos. So about twenty years ago the Turnpike Trustees and the Duke entered into an agreement. The Trustees would build a new causeway to be funded by higher turnpike tolls provided the Duke undertook to maintain it once the costs had been met and stopped charging to cross the bridge in the meantime.

However when they tried to raise tolls to pay for the work those driving stock along the road raised a stink – worse than the geese. People boycotted St Ives and started going to Huntingdon instead. All that added to the pressure until some of the trustees got the charges put down and offered a rebate to those who'd paid the higher fees. But with lower tolls they got less income, and until they had enough money they couldn't start to build the new road. Eventually John Margetts offered to lend the cash – at a good rate of interest. They're an important family in the area, millers, merchants, brewers and solicitors. Perhaps he thought it would stop people talking about the scandal of his marriage -–he'd run off to Gretna Green with the wife of the Marquess of Townshend, not bothering about waiting for any divorce first.

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With John Margetts' private money behind it, the road across the flood meadows at St Ives could proceed, or at least it could once they'd sorted out the details with the Duke of Manchester who owned the old bridge with its chapel.

The turnpike trustees appointed William Biggs to be surveyor in charge of the works, but the Duke insisted his man, William Ellis, a Kimbolton bricklayer, should oversee it all. All they needed was somebody to design it: for to carry travellers over the flooded land whatever the weather meant that the new road would have to be raised above the ground on a large number of brick arches. This was a major piece of engineering for a small turnpike trust, but if they did not built it then the livestock trade would go elsewhere, and the new Mayor of Huntingdon was already promising to establish a stock market in his town.

Finally in 1822 work started; one thing they needed were labourers, men who would need to be lodged or put up in camps around the works. They would need feeding, they would visit

the inns and taverns to spend their wages, get drunk, cause disturbances, look at other men's women – but it had to be put up with.

Then they needed bricks as near to the site as possible. Fortunately there was the How Hill brickyards nearby that produced pale-coloured bricks, ideal for the Great White Bridge that was planned. Some folk remarked how the works were owned by the same John Margetts who had lent the money to allow construction to start, they also noticed how once the job was completed he'd made enough money to sell up and retire.

But he had to earn his money. The clay was hand-dug by spade in autumn, left in heaps over the winder to be weathered by frost before being tempered and kneaded with chalk, ashes and water in a pug mill. Each brick was hand-made and – according to Flanagan – an experienced moulder with children to assist him could produce 4,000 of them in a twelve-hour day. Once dried they were fired in a kiln and graded till over a million were stacked ready for construction to start.

Now they had to find somebody to actually build it. The man they chose was John Turner who at the beginning of the contract lived in King Street, Cambridge though by the time he'd finished he was able to afford a much more prestigious address in Maid's Causeway. It was a massive operation, starting from the St Ives end of the road, workers excavated down to the hard gravel, laid sleepers as foundations and bricklaying started. But Turner did not hang around, once he got going the causeway was built in less than 24 weeks.

By September 1822 all was ready for opening. The great and the good, accompanied by the usual retinue of scroungers and hangers-on, watched as the first vehicle – the Wisbech stagecoach - made its stately way over the new raised causeway, following a band of music whose occasional discordant notes caused the lead horses to skitter nervously. Then it was time for the obligatory celebration lunch at the Dolphin Inn.

The new bridge was the wonder of the age, and attracted the attention of that famous road engineer, Thomas Telford, who came down to St Ives to see for himself, and made a sketch of the bridge and its arches. He pronounced himself sufficiently impressed, though perhaps he'd visited the Dolphin first for what he drew was not actually the same as what still stands: the longest road causeway with the most brick aches in the Kingdom.

But whilst rejoicing the public adulation the Turnpike Trustees were having to face the facts: such work did not come cheap, and somebody had to pay for it. If only the Americans had not revolted it would have been much cheaper.

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Once the new causeway at St Ives opened, the problems really began. It had cost over £4,000, plus £320 to the Government for brick tax. This iniquitous charge had been originally imposed to pay for the American War of Independence, that conflict was long lost but there was no sign it being dropped. It all had to be paid for somehow, and the only was by taxing the people who used it.

But the last time the Turnpike Trust tried raising charges right along the route from Ramsey to Biggleswade they'd faced a boycott. So this time they decided on a new toll just to cross the new bridge and only for as long as it took to pay off the debt. Inevitably the road users objected, putting tremendous pressure on the trustees until they halved the charge. This only made things worse; the people who had to pay at all the other gates now complained that it was wrong that St Ives should be favoured in this way.

A furious argument broke out with trustees criticising each other publicly in the newspapers. Even a great flood in November 1823 could not cool the ardour of the protagonists, though it did prove the value of the scheme, as for the first time travellers could actually get into the town from the south – if only they paid the toll. In fact some got across free, for the new toll house beside the Dolphin Inn was flooded and the toll keeper and his family had to wait, knee deep in water, for several hours before anybody realised their plight and sent a boat to their relief. It was then that Elliott Smith's informant, Mrs Flanagan from Hemingford Abbots, had come to the family's aid, providing dry clothes for the children and taking an interest in their welfare.

As the toll house dried out so the arguments heated up. One of the trustees, George Hewett of Hilton Hall, took legal action against the rest, claiming that the St Ives members of the board were acting to the benefit of local businesses and discriminating against everybody else. When he won his case the Trust appealed to the Assize Court, only to loose the court papers and with it the argument. Nevertheless they were convinced that they were right and continued to keep the lower charge.

St Ivians watched to see what would happen next; they did not have long to wait. Despite the great expense on both sides, the matter moved on to the High Court which ordered the tolls to be put up match all other gates on the road. Still the Trustees refused to comply and the matter dragged on and on until at last a compromise was reached. In 1825 they decided that the new St Ives bridge toll should remain as it was – but that all the others would be put down to that level. This meant less income and it would take even longer to pay off the loan they'd taken out to build the bridge. Of course until that debt was settled the extra gate would have to be kept open and people visiting the town would have to pay. All this to encourage people to bring their cattle to market there, rather than at Huntingdon just down the road.

At last the necessary money was scraped together. Now the hated new gate could be removed for ever. Except Mr Hewett threatened legal action once more, demanding that tollgate be retained until all the others were also closed down. But this time nobody agreed with him, particularly residents of Fenstanton and the Hemingfords, for although they were exempt from paying toll to the Duke of Manchester to cross the old bridge, they'd had to fork out for the new one.

At the end of 1833 the great crowd assembled to watch the gate taken off its hinges; the town band turned out, the church bells rang and there was a brilliant display of fireworks.

But they celebrated too soon; once the debt on the new bridge was paid off then it became the property of the Duke of Manchester; he now had to maintain it – and that meant he could re-erect the original toll on the old bridge. He claimed the new causeway was badly constructed, and threatened – now that it was his – to pull it down. Only after more legal action, and a considerable amount of repairs, did he assume responsibility for what was acclaimed as a major piece of civil engineering.

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The most remarkable thing in all the legal activity at St Ives was that Charles Henry Cooper, the Cambridge coroner, had not been involved in it. He was certainly involved in virtually everything else. In 1832 he had been one of those townsmen who had drawn up a petition to parliament to protest against the state of the Corporation in Cambridge.

One prime concern had been the way the councillors were trying to restrict the electorate. Only freemen could vote at elections and 100 years earlier, in 1736, nearly 250 had registered – that at a time when the population of Cambridge was less than 6,000. By 1832 – with nearly 21,000 residents - there were just 158 of them.

Originally any sons of registered freemen were entitled to be freemen themselves but recently the corporation had sought to bend the rules to keep the numbers down. It all hinged on the words 'filius natu maximus' in the regulations. The deputy Mayor, Sir John Mortlock had sought the advice of Henry Gunning who delved back into the ancient documents to try and discover just what this meant. He was convinced they read 'eldest' and not 'first-born' son but Mortlock would not listen and blocked several applicants because they'd had elder brothers – even though those brothers had died in infancy.

His ruling had been challenged in 1818 when William Whittred, himself a barrister, applied to be a freeman, claiming that he was the eldest son of his father. When his application was turned down William took out a law suit, but died before it could be heard. However Charles Henry Cooper pointed out that several senior Councillors had not applied that rule to their own sons. Alderman Andrew White had four lads – James, Christopher, Richard and Robert – but it was Robert who became a freeman. He went on to be appointed Town Clerk and to have two sons himself, the second of whom was admitted to the freemanship.

In other cases the Corporation had refused the register the first son because he happened to have been born just outside Cambridge, and then turned down his bother because he was not the first-born. Ebeneezer Foster thought there was another reason: his nephew had been rejected because he'd been born at Biggleswade (which was fair enough). But the council had then admitted Charles Harvey who'd been born at Bagshot. The only reason to differentiate between them was that Charles' father was a fervent supporter of the Duke of Rutland, and it was the Tory Duke of Rutland who controlled Cambridge.

In the old days you could pay a fee to be admitted: people wanting to buy a freemanship had to be proposed at one council meeting and confirmed at the next. In the 1670s it would cost an existing freeman just fourpence for each child, but things had got a lot more expensive. At the turn of the century the charge was one guinea each, though the majority of the people accepted just happened either to be resident at Cheveley or in the vicinity of the Duke of Rutland's castle at Belvoir and were mainly his tenants. It didn't take too much puzzling to work out which way they would vote!

Then in 1818 another batch had been appointed, this time tradesmen supporting the Tory cause. Unkind folk had noticed how this was just after an election at which that particular party had seen its majority decimated. Those people had paid ten guineas for a vote. Twenty other gentlemen offered double that price, but were turned down – Pickwick wondered what party they had supported. But Rutland did not get it all his own way: more than thirty of his supporters who were prepared to pay twenty-five guineas were turned down by councillors who were getting worried about too many outsiders getting in on the act. But only after somebody threatened to take legal proceedings against them. Some could still buy influence: Mr Leake was admitted in 1826 after he had lent the Corporation a large sum to pay its legal expenses in the Toll Cause case – but then he was a Member of Parliament and a special case.

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If you weren't the first son of a freeman, or couldn't buy you way in there was another way to secure the freemanship of Cambridge. This was the time-honoured method of serving a seven-year apprenticeship to a master who was himself a freeman. The rules laid down that

the indenture had to be enrolled with the town clerk when it would be carefully examined and if it passed scrutiny then the privileges were granted.

But the councillors had tried to put impediments in the way. They refused the request of Elijah Greenwood claiming that he had not boarded and lodged with his master. That was the first time they'd tried that trick and Elijah appealed. The Corporation took legal advice, found they were wrong, and had to enrol him.

With John Hammond they tried another ploy, claiming that he had been over 21 when bound apprentice in the first place – that was a new one too. Then Bill Brown also found himself in dispute, but in his case the matters were a little different.

Brown claimed he'd been apprentice to his father, James, a member of the council who earned his living as a printer and postmaster. But the father did not always work for himself, often being employed by Mr Hodson, the proprietor of the Cambridge Chronicle, and the son had also helped out there – in fact he'd learned more from Hodson than his dad. When questioned further he conceded that he had in fact been apprenticed to the two of them at the same time. But how could a man serve two masters and, crucially, Hodson was not a freeman.

It all seemed a lost of hassle, just for the right to vote. But that wasn't the only privilege that freemen – or burgesses as they were also called - enjoyed. For a freeman could fish in the Cam – not that anybody would want to eat the fish that did manage to survive in that sewage-polluted stream. Then any of them who were butchers had the exclusive right of common for their sheep on Sheep's Green. And a freeman could use the scalding-house near St Edward's Church four days a week. There they could scald their hogs for just twopence each or their boars for a shilling a time

But there was something worth much more than that: freemen were exempt from paying tolls to cross Silver Street bridge – or at least they had been until those tolls were themselves proved illegal and scrapped. This had been a great benefit to those bringing their carts in and out of the town centre, well worth any inducement that had been demanded.

But those who made their money in the river trade were the most anxious to become freemen. Not only were they exempt from tolls at Cambridge but, more crucially, were also saved paying them at King's Lynn. William Freeman Coe used to have to pay eight-pence for every ton of iron that came in by sea at Lynn; as soon as he became a freeman in fact as well as name then those payments ceased. If only Samuel Beales had been successful in his application then he could have saved £200 in a single year, having speculated by importing deal boards for the rebuilding of the theatre in London's Drury Lane.

But when Foster and his elder brother dissolved their partnership then the tolls were applied again – for only the oldest son could be a freeman by right. So he'd turned to Frederick Cheetham Mortlock, when he'd been mayor, and offered him £50 to be admitted to the select company of voters. No problem, Mortlock had said, provided Foster promised to support the Tory Duke of Rutland. But this was a commitment he was not prepared to give. Then just promise not to actually vote against the Tory interest, he'd been urged. Even this was too much of a commitment – if he was to be a free burgess he must be free to vote as his conscience dictated. So he did not get a vote at all, and he had to pay the navigation tolls.

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The real benefit in becoming a freeman of Cambridge was not just getting a vote, not getting exemption from tolls: it was something far more tangible. If you were a freeman you could perhaps be elected as a councillor; if you served long enough and well enough you might be

elevated to Alderman. Public duties could be odorous but there were perks – or at least there had been just a few years ago, as Elliott Smith the auctioneer and valuer was able to point out.

In the late 1700s Cambridge Corporation owned a large amount of land that was just laying waste doing nothing except growing weeds. So they decided to get rid of it and in this they'd proved so efficient that within 40 years a considerable portion of the real property had been sold and all the remaining estates leased for various terms, much of it for 999 years.

Finding tenants who could be relied upon to look after the land properly was an obvious problem. But here they were in luck. For it just so happened that several of the councillors and aldermen were willing to help out and take on the land themselves.

In 1784 the Corporation let Edward Gillam lease a house called New England in Barnwell; it cam with eight acres of arable land at an annual rent of £3 a year for 40 years. He appreciated his good fortune so extended the lease for 999 years at the same price. Today the land would command an annual rent of £24. Then three years later Richard Gates – the brother-in-law of Alderman Butcher - did a similar deal on land behind the Castle Inn in St Andrew's Street

Such practices were causing concern and, according to Cooper, legal action had been threatened against the council to get them to stop, but a compromise was agreed and the matter was allowed to rest. Two years later it started again when Alderman John Newling took out a 21 year lease on the Queen's Arms in Barnwell. Then he renegotiated the deal taking out a 999 year lease – and although he had to pay double the rent it was still only four guineas a year

But all this caused work and somebody had to ensure that the rent was actually received. It would be much simpler just to sell the land off, once and for all. Of course it would not be proper for the Corporation to sell the land to its own councillors so on 16th August 1791 they off-loaded two pieces of waste ground to Stephen Robinson of Horseheath, bringing in £21 for the coffers.

Stephen did not hang around; next day he sold it on to his friend, Joseph Butcher, and made a quick nine pounds profit on the transaction. Now it just so happened that Joseph was an Alderman and the land he now owned comprised some 1,386 feet either side of the present Regent Street. It was quickly developed for shops and houses and its value soared; in fact in 1810 Joseph sold off just 18 feet of frontage which brought him in more than he'd paid for the whole lot.

Now you might say that this was fortunate speculation, but Peter Musgrave had also been convinced that the prosperity of Cambridge would increase and land become very valuable. He'd bought in the open market and was very angry when he heard the Corporation had sold all this to Butcher for just £30. He knew that at auction it would have fetched at least £200 and builders or speculators might have pushed the price up to £400. But others considered Alderman Butcher's bargain so good that it was the signal for a general scramble for waste land among the rest of the councillors.

One who opposed the idea of such profiteering was Alderman Burleigh – no supporter of the Tory council. But he became a victim. For Alderman Butcher had also snapped up 345 feet of land fronting Maid's Causeway for a bargain price of two guineas. This land was opposite Burleigh's house and Butcher threatened to build cottages on it, spoiling the outlook. So the public-spirited gentleman who had played his part in Cambridge corporate life had to dig deep into his pockets to buy it for £345 – which at a pound a foot was a massive price for Cambridge land. But there were better profits than that to be made!

Perhaps the best deal in all the great sell-off of corporation land had been that secured by Thomas Robinson at Michaelmas 1791. He was the brother in law of one of the senior members of the council and had obtained the lease of land known as Clement Hostel – the site of one of the buildings rented by the early University students before the establishment of colleges. It had an interesting history – but now Elliott Smith was more concerned about its more recent past.

Thomas paid a rent of £20 for a 999-year lease; he obviously realised it was a bargain for three years later he acquired more on similar terms. The land he now controlled was to the south of St Clement's church with a long frontage to Bridge Street. It included a public house, a liquor-shop, an excellent saddler's shop, a mansion house and six or eight other houses together with livery stables, yards and very large garden. Robinson did nothing except build a small summer-house and wait. Then when the time was right, in 1828 he sold it to Ebeneezer Foster for £3,750! It gave Thomas Robinson the best return on an investment probably ever known in Cambridge history. But even that was not the end, for Foster soon sold it again, this time in lots and realised a very considerable profit.

Alderman John Purchas was at least apparently open in his acquisition of land. In 1792 he leased land behind the brewhouse in Thompson's Lane. Later he took on the Bricklayers' Arms in St Andrew's Street for which he paid £20, another guinea for land in Silver Street on which part of the Three Crowns was built, and the White Hart – now called the Dunghill Cock on Peas Hill. But his best acquisition was land down Regent Street. He bought it for three guineas and three years later sold a small part of it to Sir Busick Harwood for £210 – that was after Downing College had been erected, which had seen prices soar.

But that same Alderman John Purchas – who'd been elected Mayor in 1832 – was also implicated in another dubious transaction. It involved his son William (who'd also since elevated to the position of Alderman). The land this time was near Centry Bridge which William bought for two guineas in 1810. The strange thing was that he was out of the country at the time and claimed to know nothing about his purchase. He said he never paid for it, nor paid any rent, though he did admit to selling it to Gonville and Caius College for £50. William Letherum Radford claimed it was worthless, since it was a watering-place for cattle fronted by a ditch that would cost more to arch over that it was worth. But it was an eligible spot for building – why Alderman Butcher was selling building ground within a stone's throw at 20-40/- the foot and it would have been cheap at £150, let alone two guineas!

Nor were these the only abuses: Alderman Thomas Bond bought waste land on the south side Maid's Causeway – now garden ground in front of Doll's Close, some of most respectable houses in Cambridge; he paid two guineas, its real value was £120. Alderman Frederick Cheetham Mortlock – another Mayor – paid £40 for two acres of land in Hills Road which he sold the following year for 400 guineas. Alderman John Spencer leased three acres of Clay Pits in Chesterton west field for 40 years at rent of 20/- which he then underlet for 50. Other similar land was selling for £40 an acre but although this plot had never been sold it now belonged to his son, John Spencer, the senior treasurer of the Corporation.

How on earth did this come about, Pickwick enquired. Well it was all above board – at lease according to Richard Starmer. He'd bought St Austin's Close and land in Coe Fen for £150. He knew full well that both were worth £300 each and did not know why the corporation let him have it for so little. The referees had valued the land – and he had not been at that meeting. But just who were these people who fixed the prices of Corporation land sold to councillors – why other councillors of course!

The process by which Cambridge councillors had sold or leased off corporation land had been examined by Government Commissioners back in 1833. Both Charles Henry Cooper and Elliott Smith had attended the sessions and submitted evidence, as the latter recalled.

The first to be quizzed on the process was Richard Starmer a common councilman who had himself profited from a transaction in 1809. He'd admitted that at that time several members of the Corporation got very good bargains. Other prominent gentlemen followed him into the hot-seat as the tangled state of affairs began to be unravelled.

These days when leases were renewed the Mayor appointed four aldermen and two councillors to inspect the premises, consider the rents and report back to the next council meeting. Previously there were eight on the committee. It would of course have been quite wrong for the person actually seeking the lease to be a one of that group but their relations could be – after all were they not people of integrity.

They each inspected the land and calculated the value of the property according to their own idea – they never bothered to take professional advice from surveyors or valuers – something that had annoyed Elliott Smith intensely. Each calculated the rent they thought a respectable tenant would give – but not the value of the land if put up for public sale or auction (though by granting 999-year leases they were effectively selling it off). They then made deductions for land-tax and repairs before coming up with a figure and adjourning to a room to consider the price. The committee were not always in agreement and in that case the majority view prevailed. Their principle was to give the lessee a good bargain, so it was the lower price that was usually agreed and there would be a different calculation for a stranger than there would for a friend. There was another rule – a councillor should have a better bargain than a burgess, a discount of 10% at least - and an alderman better still – it was only Corporation land after all.

Having done their civic duty they went off to dine together and if the person who had been successful in his application just happened to be a councillor himself, why it was natural that he should join his colleagues – and perhaps supply a glass of wine to toast his good bargain. He would not pay for the meal – no that came out of the half-a-guinea charged on the person requesting the valuation. Without a doubt property had been sold and leased for much less than it was worth. Even so sometimes the whole council disagreed, usually claiming that the figure was too high - and at others the applicant refused the terms offered. Any income from property would be devoted to corporation entertainment – but none was actually handed out to councillors personally nor spent on public improvements.

But what of the byelaws of July 1758 and September 1819 requiring estates to be let by auction, the senior treasurer was asked. He replied that he had never heard of them, but did agree that he had been present when they were changed in August 1823 and the 999-year leases finally abolished. C.H.Cooper had commented that it had been a strange coincidence that the 1758 byelaw had been repealed on the very day that land in Regent Street had been sold to Alderman Butcher – and this had been the sale that opened the floodgates.

Between 1801 and 1831 the population of Cambridge had doubled and land prices had soared to meet the demand. If the corporation estates had been properly let they would have produced a rental of at least £2,000 a year making Cambridge one of the richest corporations in the country. As it was they were virtually penniless.

Buckle and Long, the commissioners sent down to enquire into the state of the Corporation of Cambridge in 1833 – and what a state it had been in – moved on to take other evidence. The corporation accounts – such as they were – were audited each year and just to make sure they were correct Alderman Alexander Abbott who held the office of surgeon to the town gaol made a point of being round to answer any questions about what he had submitted claims for. But he always declined to give details about individual cases and the sums charged. The auditors – other aldermen and councillors - took his word for it. Nobody had ever complained or ever asked to inspect the books. Not so, claimed Charles Cooper; he'd attended an auditing session as deputy town clerk, only to be told that didn't qualify him to listen to proceedings. So then he'd claimed the right to remain as a member of the public at which the rest of the body had left the room and continued the meeting behind locked doors.
At least the Commissioners got some answers when they examined the Cambridge charities. It was of no particular surprise when they discovered £100 from the charity of Sir Thomas White that was meant to be spent on four poor young men had instead gone into corporation funds. There were various amounts of income due from booths at Stourbridge Fair, three given by Christopher Francke – worth nearly £2 a year – had not been paid for at least a century, three more from William Foxton and four from Samuel Newton were also not distributed. But the amount of trade at the fair had declined – not surprising when one considered the state of the common, with horses standing up to their knees in mud. At least Stourbridge Common was a bit better than Coe Fen where the mire came up to the horses' knees and medical men were warning that if it were not drained it would be fatal to the health of the town.

The coal from the charity of Elizabeth Wolfe which was supposed to be distributed to the poor had been forgotten about although the lumps bequeathed by Lambert Damps were still being supplied. But six women in the spital house had not been receiving the income due to them from the profits of the clay pits at Chesterton and a similar fate had befallen bequests from Thomas Ellys, John Sherward, Thomas Medsope and Thomas Greaves

It seemed the best way to ensure your wishes were honoured was to tie in the distribution of money with the preaching of sermons – at least the names of Richard Chevin, Edward Chapman and William Mott were remembered at least one day a year.

John Crane in his will of June 1651 had instructed his executors to buy enough land to produce an income of £60 a year. This was to be used to set up three young men, each receiving £20 for 20 years. Two were to be university students, the third a townsman. When repaid the money was to pass on to another recipient until 10 people had benefited from it. Then it was be bestowed upon honest poor men in prison for debt or old women. They must be honest, godliest and religious persons who had lived well but fallen into decay by some extraordinary occasions and it was not to be given to any dissembling hypercritical persons. What made Crane's bequest different is that the money was passed in rotation to other towns with Ipswich, King's Lynn and Wisbech also receiving it. The latter corporation used it for charitable purposes and published audited accounts. But in Cambridge the money had been received regularly but spent, not on the poor, but on tradesmen who had been told they must wait for the payment of their bills until Crane's money came in.

If all this was criminal, so was the way the police were handling matters. Many of the constables kept alehouses – despite this being prohibited by act of parliament. Laws were made by politicians, politicians needed to be elected and elections needed to be policed. Most of the constables supported the Tory party and for the most part were well behaved when the Tory candidates were returned. But General Manners had been wounded in a riot on election day 1818 and despite the presence of a number of magistrates nobody had been apprehended nor were any steps taken to bring the rioters to justice.

The Government investigators into the state of the corporation of Cambridge had probed into many aspects of the town's affairs and unearthed a sorry story of corruption and mismanagement.

Then they turned their attention to the police. Pickwick already had some impressions that all was not what it should be amongst that institution, but he was unprepared for what John Bowtell related. He had been one of the first to peruse the report when it was delivered to the University Library and since then it had scarcely been on the shelves.

Cambridge was a town internationally famous, but it was not a town that welcomed foreigners. A few years earlier a Turkish pedlar who sold fancy goods, had taken up his abode at the Wrestler's Inn – a place Pickwick knew to be a haunt of rogues. His dress and appearance attracted the attention of some boys who began to tease him, they hallooed after him and insulted him. He responded to their taunts and, becoming enraged, struck one of the lads. That evening the number of boys increased and on the following night a still larger number assembled and proceeded to break the windows of the inn.

None of this was apparently noticed by the police but did attract the attention of the University's Esquire Bedel. However as he was going out of town he sent a message to one of the magistrates to say he apprehended a riot. On his return he found the poor Turk had disappeared: not because of his ill usage from the mob, but because the constables who did eventually turn up to disperse the crowd had charged him eight shillings for the privilege. The pedlar had packed his wares and left, claiming he could not afford to live in a town where it cost him eight shillings a night for protection.

But why protect a foreigner when even public officials were fair game? In 1831 there was a meeting to hear appeals over tax assessments. Although everybody knew there'd be trouble, no precautions were taken. Mr. Ward the inspector, and the surveyor of taxes, were shamefully beaten; their clothes were tom off their backs, and they were obliged to take shelter at the Red Lion for safety. This all took place in broad daylight, but no attempt was made to punish the perpetrators.

The Professor of Geology reported to the inquiry men that when he was University proctor in 1827-8 he received no co-operation from the police; during the riots of 5th November he called on one of the magistrates for assistance to prevent disturbances. He was received with courtesy but had no substantial support from the town constables. After the Proctors had managed to send the undergraduates back to their colleges he himself was grossly insulted and personally maltreated by the mob but received no help except from his own men. When the long vacation started and the proctors ceased to patrol the streets indecencies immediately manifested themselves in a prominent way.

Not even prisoners were safe: in 1830 two persons were apprehended on suspicion of being resurrection men. They were taken to Mr. Alderman Purchas' house to be questioned and whilst there a prodigious crowd collected and preparations were made for attacking the men when they came out, with all kinds of filth provided for the purpose. When the suspects were sent to the Town Goal, handcuffed and attended by two constables, the smaller prisoner was knocked down and kicked violently; he had to be dragged along by the other whilst dirt and filth were poured on both of them. One was injured so seriously that he was obliged to have a man to sit up with him all night. The riot happened in broad daylight after the mob had spent several hours preparing for the attack but no effort was made to send police reinforcements. Nor were the rioters punished, although they were well known. Indeed some of them had the effrontery to go about the town to solicit subscriptions, publicly stating they had received contributions from two of the magistrates.

Special constables could be appointed by magistrates to meet specific problems but even here there were difficulties. The magistrates were held in such disrepute that few would respond to their call and the only people volunteering to keep the peace were the people most likely to cause a disturbance. Magistrates could not punish such offenders since they were the only group they could call on in an emergency

There had been one exception: in December 1830 over 800 respectable townspeople had enlisted to defend Cambridge after information had been obtained that an attack would be made on the colleges and the University Library burnt down. In retrospect the whole idea seemed preposterous, but it had to be seen in the context of that period.

The country had been in turmoil as the collapse in agriculture hit home. Pickwick recalled the state of affairs in London when some six thousand working men had marched with banners flying to present a petition to the King. The procession was headed by members of the Cabinet Maker's Society, followed by the weavers and others as they'd made their way through the city and West End en route to St James' Palace where George IV had accepted their address, seeking his help in the alleviation of their suffering

The citizens of London had been fearful of a riot and indeed a ferocious battle had broken out at the Tower of London – an event still spoken of in the taverns in that area, eight years later. But had been forgotten in Cambridge – now Pickwick took the opportunity of telling the tale:

The Tower was home to some of the most dangerous in the land: wild beasts who needed to be caged for public safety. But they were constantly looking for an opportunity to escape. The chance arose when a warder inadvertently opened a door that separated two of the most deadly rivals.

As soon as their eyes made contact a battle ensued. Each leapt at the other roaring and snarling at the top of their voices while other ferocious captives roared encouragement and rattled their bars in an attempt to add their muscle to the life-and-death struggle. Meanwhile their more timid neighbours shivered with dread and shrieked with terror

The Beefeaters looked on helpless: their ceremonial pikes were useless against the raw power of these combatants. In theory they should be equally matched, but one had been in captivity for seven years and the other was newly arrived and still fighting fit – and what's more it had the assistance of its mate who was playing her full part in the proceedings, scratching like a crazed cat.

Eventually the outnumbered protagonist was flung onto his back and the end seemed near. But still he fought on – this was one king that was not to be overcome so easily. Now help was at hand, warders heated red-hot rods and thrust them into the nostril of the uppermost attacker, forcing it to lose its grip. At this the underdog leapt snarling back into the fray and bit through the lower jaw of its opponent. Yet more red-hot rods were needed before they could be separated and driven back to their own cells after a battle of full half-an-hour.

Whilst medical assistance was called attempts were made to placate the other inmates – the bears, leopards, panthers, wolves and hyenas that had witnessed a titanic struggle between the King of the Jungle – a huge lion - and a Bengal royal tiger and tigress. They had been two of the main attractions amongst the menagerie of wild beasts kept to delight visitors to the Tower of London. Others worried about whether the disturbance had caused the ravens to fly away, symbolising the collapse of the monarchy itself in that winter of discontent.

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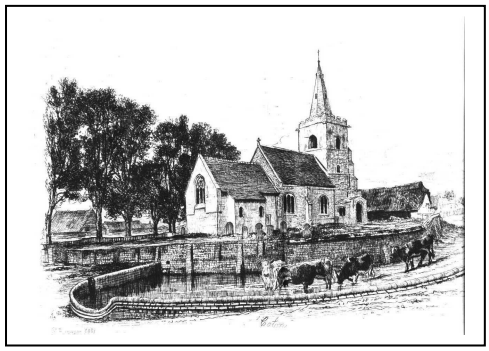
The approach to the Christmas of 1830 had not been a peaceful one, as communities throughout the country armed and prepared to fight to protect their property. The enemy was not the French – though they too were mobilising in the face of international sabre-ratting. No, here the enemy were those living on the doorstep and their weapon was incendiarism and mob violence. Elliott Smith had been preparing for the sale of the furniture and effects of the Reverend Pugh who was leaving Barton when he heard news of a fire at Richard Angier's farm at Coton. This was a very extensive farm somewhat away from the rest of the village. There was the dwelling house, stabling and outbuildings, with one rickyard containing a large dovecot and another filled with cornstacks and a nearly new brick building containing a considerable quantity of wool. This stood right at the edge of the village with a gate leading into the open field. In early December somebody set fire to the last stack of beans and the wind carried the flames towards the other stacks and buildings.

Angier had been entertaining a small party of friends when about 6 o'clock he looked out of the door and noticed the fire that was just getting hold. He instantly raised the alarm but the flames had extended a considerable distance before any assistance could be given. The wind was very brisk and several masses of burning thatch wafted across the premises setting alight the barns and other buildings behind the house.



Soon the flames were lighting up the sky and were seen from Cambridge – it was a magnificent spectacle and several thousand persons made their way to offer assistance. One or two engines were brought in as well but it was obvious there was no chance of saving the corn stacks, so they directed their exertions to the farm house and adjacent buildings. This was accomplished thanks to the strenuous exertions of numerous individuals from the town, particularly some members of the university, several of whom at great personal risk, seated themselves on the thatched roof of the outbuildings and by continually pouring water on them mainly contributed to their preservation. Other gentlemen stood for 2-3 hours up to their middle in water, in a pond filling buckets.

A number of agricultural labourers from adjacent villages were also present of whom some offered assistance, but the major part looked on with apathy and indifference. But they all shared in the beer that was dished out afterwards at the Plough and John Barleycorn Inns – nearly £5 worth of ale was drunk to clear the smoke from their throats: the publicans made their money that day. The damage was assessed at about £3,000 but although he had insurance at the Sun Fire Office they only paid out about £2,200, so by the time Angier had rebuilt the barn he was considerably out of pocket. The house itself was not materially damaged but the hastily removed furniture was and various farm implements got broken far more than could easily be understood.

Much of the talk was about who'd set it on fire and why. The Angiers had farmed in Coton for centuries, and Richard had regularly taken on the tasks of Overseer to the Poor, Surveyor of the Highways, Churchwarden and so on - no doubt offending more than one person. But he was highly respected by almost all who know him. What's more he'd never used a threshing machine nor had one on his premises except for a single day more than ten years earlier.

But there were also outbreaks of incendiarism in stacks at Bassingbourn, Somersham, Eaton Socon and Pampisford Mills prompting one of the county's Members of Parliament, Lord

Osborne, to seek permission to leave his government duties to travel back home so he could be on hand should the situation deteriorate into the full-scale riots that people feared.

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Elliott Smith, the auctioneer, was a man who travelled extensively in the course of his trade, and he had especial cause to be nervous in the latter weeks of 1830. Rumours had spread on the Wednesday evening, 24th November, of how between 40 and 50 men had assembled in the village of Sawtry and started to demolish two threshing machines. Next evening they'd been joined by a larger group from Upton and Alconbury who set out on an orgy of destruction, wrecking machines at Mr Sturton's at Alconbury Hill, Mr Dunn's at Stukely Lodge and farmer Wright's at Monk's Wood House. Soon the mob numbered between 200 and 300 people and, having finished their smashing, they continued on to Buckworth where they arrived about half-past-two in the morning, breaking up two machines on the farms of Gray and Bowker.

On Saturday a smaller group commenced operations in the neighbourhood of Stilton, but by now the landowners were prepared for them. The Rev Gordon placed himself at the head of a group of gentlemen, farmers and others to fight for their homes. There were several skirmishes, during which one of the rioters raised his axe and threatened to brain Mr Berkley of Cottestock, but a bystander struck his arm and broke it. Finally they succeeded in rounding up 18 of the ringleaders who were sent under escort to Huntingdon gaol. There a number of special constables had been sworn in and despatched under the orders of the Under-Sheriff to the villages where insurrections had occurred. Under cover of darkness they surprised and arrested 25 of the labourers who had been involved, together with three poachers who happened to blunder into their path. By now the cells at Huntingdon gaol were getting somewhat crowded!

Then just when things seemed to be quietening came rumours that a large body of Whittlesey rioters were on their way to break open the gaol and liberate the prisoners. Several active young men formed themselves into troops of cavalry and infantry to await their arrival. As they mustered on the common and practised military manoeuvres they were joined by 40 gentlemen from Whittlesey, accompanied by a magistrate. Boosted by such reinforcement, and perceiving the threat to have lessened, 60 of the principal farmers also came forward to form a troop and 300-400 men were sworn in as special constables. Peterborough was also worried by the prospect of invasion from Whittlesey. A meeting was held in the Angel Inn to form a watch for the protection of property in the city and suburbs; men started to patrol the streets from ten at night to five in the morning; and similar patrols were made around farmyards.

Meanwhile at March the magistrates were warned of that a gang of 200-300 agricultural labourers, headed by a number of poachers, were approaching from Northamptonshire and Huntingdonshire, destroying property as they went. Everybody considered the labouring population of March to be as peaceable, loyal and satisfied as any in the country. They were employed at fair wages, most had a pig in the sty – some six of them. Potato land was let out from a rood to half acre and most men had a garden. There was well-paid work for every man, woman and child together with good schools. If March rioted, nowhere was safe.

Notices were sent to all the churches and dissenting chapels – Smith had preserved one. It read: 'All persons desirous of protecting themselves, their families and property, are requested to attend immediately after divine service, at Thomas Orton's to be sworn in as special constables, it having been presented that a party of riotous persons are assembling in the neighbourhood of Whittlesey and other parishes for the purpose of destroying threshing machines and other agricultural property'. Soon 400 were prepared to fight, though not Mr Orton himself: he was suffering from gout but from his bed-chamber he masterminded the

defence of the town. One man was then despatched on a fast horse to gallop to Whittlesey and form an alliance pact with the magistrates there pledging that should one town be attacked the other would come to its defence.
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Rumours had spread in that run-up to Christmas of 1830, raising fear in Cambridge. At Balsham 200 labourers had met demanding increased wages and there were similar gatherings at Horseheath and Shudy Camps where farmers, anxious to preserve the peace, promised to examine their grievances while a troupe of yeomanry cavalry was being raised at Arrington, just in case.

At Elmdon one hundred labourers stopped work, demanding more money and proceeded to the church, situated in the park of Mr John Wilkes at Lofts Hall, where the respectable inhabitants had assembled to consider what to do. The mob locked them in and left a guard on the door before marching to Mr Wilkes' house and demanded that twelve shillings a week should be paid to his labourers. Seeing them coming, he despatched a messenger across the fields to Lord Braybrooke at Saffron Walden and to the parishioners of Newport, Wendon and Littlebury, seeking their assistance. The response was immediate: a number of gentlemen volunteered to be sworn in as special constables, rescued the trapped parishioners and arrested seven of the ringleaders who were confined in Newport gaol.

Amongst the destruction in Suffolk was an incident at Great Thurlow where about 150 men with boughs in their hands entered the house of Mr Gardiner, a farmer, demanding that all working men should come out. Those the found in the barns they deprived of their flails and in the fields they unharnessed horses from the ploughs and turned them loose. One of the most active insurgents was seized and committed to Bury gaol but it took considerable difficulty to get him into the cart to take him there. Much credit was due to Mr R. Elwes who, with a strong whip, fought off the men who reelease to rescue the prisoner. At Withersfield and nearby villages labourers refused to return to work and two attempts made to set fire to property at Great Bradley.

Out in Norfolk things were as bad. The Lord Lieutenant at the head of a troop of horsemen broke up riots at St Faith's and sent seven of the ringleaders to Wymondham bridewell under an escorted headed by Edward Lombe. But on his return a cowardly rascal flung a stone, hitting him at the back of the head and nearly knocking him from his horse.

Things were worse at Stotford in Bedfordshire where a desperate riot took place. It had been building up for some days and one of the farmers let it be known if workers would continue to be quiet that he would meet their demands. But on the Wednesday night dissidents began to assemble, dragged many of the more peaceable inhabitants from their beds and forced them to join their throng. They then proceeded to the residence of the more respectable inhabitants demanding an increase of wages and were told to attend a vestry meeting next morning – at which they dispersed. But early next morning they made their way every farmhouse compelling every man and boy to join them and declaring that neither man nor horse should work that day. Then they turned up to the vestry meeting demanding that they be exempt from the payment of taxes – every house had been assessed but the magistrates had already agreed that paupers should not be charged. Next they called for the dismissal of the assistant over-seers – agreed – and then a wage of two shillings a day for every man. Now many of them were already getting this or more, but the magistrates could not accept this as a general principal and the meeting broke up. At this between 100 and 200 workers went through the village demanding bread from the bakers, beer from the publicans and money. Those who refused had their houses broken into and their property seized. This continued until nightfall when the men went into the field and collected some uncarted stubble which they ignited. They kept up the protest late into the night before separating, saying that if the demands were not met by the Saturday they would start again.

On the Friday they reported for work as usual while the farmers debated what was to be done. Mr J.G. Fordham of Odsey, who extensive corn and seed mill was threatened with destruction decided not to cave in. Under his direction a number of special constables were appointed and the Lord Lieutenant was urged to despatch another hundred, then early on the Saturday morning the ringleaders were apprehended.

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The outbreak of lawlessness that had so terrified magistrates in and around Cambridgeshire in 1830 had not been confined to this area. Nationally the Government had been worried that things were spiralling out of control. They'd emphasised their concern for the suffering and privations of the labouring classes and that they were anxious to adopt as speedily as possible every practicable and reasonable measure for its alleviation. But they also stressed that such sufferings would only be increased and protracted by concession to violence and tumult.

Magistrates had been placed in difficult circumstances; they were literally in the front line, being prominent landowners in areas now threatened with conflagration. Under the threat of violence some had advised the establishment of a uniform rate of wages for labourers and recommended the discontinuance of threshing and other machinery. But, thundered the Government, Justices had no legal authority to settle the amount of wages for labourers – any interference in such matters can only excite expectations which must be disappointed and produce a renewed spirit of discontent and insubordination. It would only lead to the most disastrous results and the tranquillity obtained by such concessions was likely to be of very transient duration. Machines were as much entitled to the protection of the law as any other property and for magistrates to recommend their discontinuance assisted in the establishment of a tyranny of most oppressive character.

From the safety of London Ministers demanded that all JPs and other magistrates demonstrate a firm resistance to all such demands, especially when accompanied with violence and aggression. Under no difficulty or extremity ought principles so contrary to the general interests of the community and so injurious to the welfare of those deluded enough to commit them be recognised, still less sanctioned by persons in authority. But there was concern about the treat to the local dignitaries who had to administer the law. It was recommended that offenders should be brought before judges and not magistrates who had committed them - but there were problems finding enough judges.

Notices were posted warning of the penalties for various offences: it was death for setting fire to any church or chapel, house, stable, coach-house, shop, mill, granary or any building carrying on any trade. It was death for any persons who riotously or tumultuously assembled together and by force demolished any building, bridge or wagon-way. It was death for any who set fire to any stack of straw, hay or wood.

Others tried reasoned arguments: some of the poor, particularly those with families, were enduring many privations but others had work at fair wages. If the farmer was compelled to raise wages of the labouring classes generally then his means would soon be exhausted and both farmer and labourer reduced to state of suffering much greater than at present. And the farmer alone could not avert the evil which afflicted the country: they were being hit by enormous demands for tithes, poors-rates and other expenses thus reducing their ability to pay labourers. Could ruining the farmer give employment to the labourer? Could burning wheat make bread cheaper. But then the paranoia came in: the crime of the incendiary was not of English growth – it came from a foreign country with hidden objects of its own.

Hertfordshire magistrates met to divide the county into districts and raise a constabulary force. They were urged to observe a circular from the Secretary of State which recommended prompt apprehension of suspicious strangers traversing the country, prying into the circumstances, property and habits of the people. These men were supposed to be the perpetrators of those horrid acts which all deplored – but sadly for Elliott Smith this was precisely what he did to earn his living as auctioneer and he had experienced a very difficult few months during those most turbulent times.

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Though the workers might be revolting, the farmers had the practical difficulties of trying to survive.

Fruit growers were facing a new threat, as Elliott Smith explained. The increased transportation of foreign fruit into London by steam carriage – both the steam ships and steam railways now spreading their tentacles across the country – were undermining local farmers. Given the high assessment of poor rates and the cost of enclosure together with the expenses of cultivation they could not compete against the foreign grower. For the thousands of honest labourers regularly employed in the cultivation of gardens, a gradually diminished demand and reduction of wages must follow.

Those growers who had cultivated trees and fruits under guaranteed laws, assisting the working classes, now faced the total destruction of their property, the rooting-up and destroying of the plantations and labours of many years. They had no alternative but to protest while there was still time.

Other farmers were faced with the proposed abolition of the corn laws: but if these were repealed the number of students at the University would be immediately diminished by a third, as their fathers would no longer be able to afford the expense of education. The revenues of the colleges - which are chiefly derived from landed property - would fall off and not more than half the money spend in Cambridge would continue.

Smith continued: “Cambridgeshire is an agricultural county and it is to the improved cultivation of the fens that the amazing growth of county town over the last twenty years may be attributed. The number of students has scarcely increased and the money spent by them has dropped. Yet we see houses and streets – almost towns – rising up on all sides as if by magic.

“This is because Cambridge is a trading town – its position makes it a market for fen produce and a resting place for it on its way down to the metropolis. Repeal the corn laws and you practically dam up the drainage of the fens and reconvert them to swamps. If landowners and farmers are both ruined and the corn imported from foreign countries you will not imagine that it will be given away. No – it must be bought with manufactures – and what can be manufactured in Cambridgeshire where water power is out of the question and coals imported down river at 30 shillings a ton?”

Even the weather was turning against them: “For the last three years there’s been extreme drought – all the common horse ponds have long since dried up, well after well and spring after spring have followed until water has become a scarce commodity. The prospect of a good harvest this year is poor; July was the most critical period when the wheat was in blossom and there was rather too much wind and complaints of the red-gum are common.”

This had added to the problems of people such as William Thurnall of Duxford who combined the role of farmer and corn merchant with that of malster, miller and oil crusher. He was now paying fifty percent more for labour than he wanted to as a sort of premium to

prevent his farms being burnt down due to the desperate state of the labouring classes. For the last nine months they're been nearly 30 men out of employment. Everybody was hanging on for the aftermath of the harvest when the gleaning bell would be rung as the symbol for women and girls to make their way to the fields to collect enough grain to feed their hens through the winter or enough barley to fat the pig for Christmas. Thurnall dreaded the arrival of the post – he knew of two farmers in Cambridge gaol for debt and scarcely opened a letter fearing it might contain notice of another bad debt. Things were hard in Duxford anyway but there was another expense the villagers faced – they had twice the number of churches to support than most people

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Duxford had two churches, Elliott Smith explained: "St Peter's is in quite good repair. It has a a small leaden spire – it used to have a large one but this was too heavy for the old tower and was pulled down - and the old pews in the chancel were replaced about a hundred years ago for what were then considered more fashionable ones. Clare College, who own the living, has been squabbling with the farmers over the payment of tithes – but the old lathe-and-plaster tithe barn is falling down and used by paupers

"St John's church is decorated with a painted wainscot containing figures almost as large as life, so well preserved you can tell who they are meant to be; they've reglazed the windows and put in a gallery but its all in a poor condition. The north chapel is boarded off from the chancel to form a schoolroom. They used to get about 35 pupils but the number's dropped, perhaps because the pupils have to pay to heat the church, so the master now also takes children from other parishes and teaches at a Sunday school.

"There's been a lot of talk about uniting the livings – but neither church is big enough to take all the inhabitants. So there are two ministers, but only one lives in the village and he takes a service in one church in the morning and the other in the afternoon – preaching to the identical same congregation.

"There's also an ancient chapel where the road crosses the river at Whittlesford Bridge. Its built of field stones and was once a hospital providing accommodation for travellers. Then part of it was turned into a house but its now used as a barn for the Red Lion inn, an old timber-framed building. Its been a prosperous place: at one time there was a fair there and you used to have to pay a toll to cross the bridge till the road was turnpiked. The landlord hires out the pastures to drovers bringing cattle down to Royston.

"They have a nonconformist chapel on the main street built by Benjamin Pyne, though since he retired seven years ago things have gone down a bit. They have their own school with about 80 pupils and what with a private boarding school as well you could say Duxford is an educated place.

"Usually I stop at the Three Horseshoes when I've business in the area. Last time I was there they were worried about what was going to happen now that the Lord of the Manor, Lord Farnborough, has died and there's no sons to inherit. There's also worries about the lands held by the Hitch family. A couple of hundred acres passed to the daughter, Alicia, but she died in 1830 and nobody's sure what will happen to it, especially since the land was being enclosed that very year.

"Since then there's been a lot of changes with Caius building their new College Farm. Most of the families earn their living from agriculture with just the usual blacksmiths and carpenters but now a number of oil-millers have started to set up. The Temple windmill is let with the farm to William Thurnall who's building up a good business sending much of his flour, malt and seed down to London. He's also set up a bone-mill worked by a water-wheel

producing fertiliser from a mound of bones 30 feet high; it might develop into a profitable venture

"One problem he's facing is the theft of his sacks – he's lost thousands of them and the courts don't help. He took James Fison to court for stealing three sacks from him – they were not worn out but holes were purposely cut in them. Fison sold them to John Moss as part of a consignment of half-a-ton of sacks and he took them to C.W. Martindale who spotted the name on them and reported it. Moss said he couldn't read and didn't know what they said and Fison said he bought sacks by weight and he never examined them. It was an unlikely story but Fison was acquitted anyway."

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Elliott Smith was all too aware how people always tried to get things they were not entitled to: Richard Barnes, overseer of Duxford, had told him about when four women approached him for relief some years before.

They showed him vagrant passes claiming to be wives and children of soldiers of the Fifth Regiment, then serving in Barbados. They'd previously applied to Joshua Hipwell, the deputy overseer for Bourn who'd checked with the Earl De La Warr and then paid them together over £2 18.0d. But Richard was more cautious and happened to know the regiment was not in Barbados but St Vincent. He voiced his suspicions and Charles Harvey, clerk to Cox and Greenwood, the army-agents, proved the passes were forgeries. The women were sentenced to twelve month's imprisonment.

But you there were times when Barnes would have been pleased to see them, especially at herring day. Back in 1574 James Bedel had left money to supply red and white herrings to the poor of both the Duxford parishes during Lent. One thousand of them were distributed on Good Friday - only last year they changed the date to November: it made more sense to do it in the colder weather, otherwise the fish went off and stank the place out!

Fish was one thing, peas another – and they came from Sawston. It was another of those ancient charities, this one set up by John Huntingdon. In his will he'd specified that whoever owned the lands of Huntingdon's Manor had to sow two acres of peas every year at the rate of one coombe per acre. They were to be white peas that were picked ripe and then dried. Such peas were a staple crop: peasants made soup and a kind of porridge from them and their bread often included a proportion of pea meal in the flour. Some say Huntingdon made the bequest after seeing a poor woman punished for stealing peas from the fields. Anyway it still continues – the landowner plants them and specifies the day they're to be picked. It's a complete scene of scramble and confusion, often with fights over who's got more than they should. Some of the old women can pick so quickly that it's not surprising the field is cleared almost as soon as they open it up.

The land is currently leased by Joseph Sharpe Cooper, one of the churchwardens. He made a great deal of money during the war against Napoleon, supplying most of the wheat, rye and flour purchased by the parish for poor relief – he got nearly £6 a quarter at a time when a labourer was earning six shillings for a full week's wages. That's how the farmers grew rich at a time of crisis and could afford good fine clothes when their fellow parishioners were in rags. Given such poverty, the last thing they needed was ghosts making it worse!

It started when Mrs Adams, wife of a respectable labourer at Sawston, noticed that the bottom of her dress was torn – she thought she must have caught it on a nail, so she sewed it up. Next morning it was torn again in the same place and in several others as well. Whatever dress she put on, it got torn. Then three of her husband's coats were also ripped. She told her neighbours who came round to look, only to find their frocks also got torn. A fifteen-year-old

girl who lodged in the house was left with only the body part of her gown, the skirt being so ripped that it dropped off as she moved about.

Well they brought the clothes to Cambridge and put them on show on the market and dozens turned out to look. Then on the Sunday there was such a procession of curious people making their way to Sawston that the village was packed and the pubs did a very good trade. But none of them had any mishaps, they came back with their dresses as intact as they'd been when they set off, only somewhat dusty from the journey. Now I'm not at all sure it was a ghost, Elliott confided, but there's bound to be some there, what with what's been happening at the Hall over the years.

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One of the stories that must be added to any Cambridgeshire scrapbook was that of Sawston Hall. It's history could be traced back to lands left by William the Conqueror to his steward, but the main tale was much later. Back in 1553 the boy king, Edward VI, had been persuaded by the Duke of Northumberland to nominate Lady Jane Grey as his successor. He died on the 6th of July, but the news of his death was hushed up until the 10th when Queen Jane was proclaimed at London.

But there was another claimant, Lady Mary who was a Hunsdon in Hertfordshire when she received a message from Edward 'praying her to come to him as he urgently desired the comfort of her presence'. So she started off to London, only to learn en route that the King was already dead and she was being lured into a trap.

So Mary turned back with her supporters and made all haste to her mansion at Kenninghall. It was too long a journey so she sought a bed at Sawston Hall, the seat of Sir John Huddleston, a prominent adherent to the banned Roman Catholic faith. She's been there once in more peaceful times. But early next morning came news that troops led by Lord Robert Dudley were riding out to capture her. Mary attended Mass, then, disguised as a dairymaid left the house by an underground passage – you can hear the hollow sound as you tread the footpath in Church Lane. Once clear of the house she rode pillion behind a manservant and escorted by Sir John made her way past Two Pond Grove and the Lady's Wash, through Hayfield Planten and the woods to Brent Ditch End, then over Pampisford Hill. On reaching the high ground she looked back to see the medieval manor house in flames, burnt by Dudley's men. She turned to Huddleston and exclaimed 'Let it blaze! When I am Queen I'll build you a better house'

But there seemed very little hope of that every happening. Once he learned his that his plan had been foiled the Duke of Northumberland raised an army of 8,000 footsoldiers and 2,000 horsemen. He raided the armoury at the Tower of London for great guns, small bows, spears, arrows, gunpowder and all the necessities of war, then accompanied by Lord Grey and the Marquis of Northampton set off for Cambridge. It was a place he knew well for he held its chief office, that of Chancellor

On his arrival he invited the Vice chancellor, Dr Sandys and other of the senior members of the university to dine with him. Next morning, being Sunday, he asked Sandys to preach. The sermons brought tears to the eyes of all that heard it and contained the prophetic words: 'whosoever doth rebel against thy commandment … he shall be put to death'. Whilst he was in the pulpit one of Dudley's men lifted up to him a mass book and grail used by Mary the night before at the now burning Sawston Hall.

Northumberland and his army set out for Newmarket where he expected further reinforcements; instead all he found was that many of his own men had deserted. Worse news

followed: in London the Council had now changed their minds and proclaimed Mary the rightful Queen. It was a worried Duke who returned to Cambridge where he too recognised his new sovereign, throwing his cap into the air. But he knew Mary was a merciful woman and would forgive him. Within an hour he was sure: a herald galloped into town with a royal proclamation: he was to lay down his arms and show himself to be a good subject. He was keen to do so, but was arrested at King's College by Roger Slegge, Sergeant at arms. Soon however came more letters from London ordering that all men should go their own way and he was released.

His ordeal was over, he enjoyed a relatively peaceful night's sleep in the peace of a Cambridge college, confident that his indiscretions had been overlooked and he was free to continue his life of luxury. Next morning however came another visitor, the Earl of Arundale. "My lord, I am sent hither by the Queen's majesty, and in her name I do arrest you; and I obey it my lord." At that the Duke of Northumberland was detained. But he was not the only one arrested in Cambridge that July morning.

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The Vice-Chancellor of Cambridge University, Dr Sandys, had done as he'd been asked in that July of 1553 and preached a sermon for the Duke of Northumberland, university Chancellor and emissary of Queen Lady Jane Grey. But things had changed almost overnight: the Protestant Queen Jane had been ousted in favour of the Catholic Queen Mary and within the University others had changed their religious beliefs as quickly. Dr Mouse, an earnest Protestant one day had become a papist.

Dr Sandys was in the fields when he head the bells ring for a congregation; he sent for the beadels and made his way to the Old Schools to take the chair. There he sought to justify his words from the pulpit the day before: he had said nothing wrong and only voiced the opinions of all of his colleagues. But he was interrupted by the arrival of one Mr Mitch and a group of twenty fervent papists who called him a traitor to the new Queen and tried to pull him from his seat.

Sandys groped for the dagger he carried, determined that he would defend himself against violence but two of his old colleagues urged him to hold his hand and be quiet. He was allowed to finish his oration but then surrendered every farthing of University money in his care, together with the official books and keys, before making his way back to his own college. Next morning he was visited by Mr Gerningham and Thomas Mildmay who told him that it was the Queen's wish that he be taken prisoner to the Tower of London, along with the Duke of Northumberland. Sandys said he had no regrets but did comment how remarkable it was that Mildmay had been one day armed against Queen Mary and was now one of her most fervent supporters: "I cannot blow hot and cold after this sort"

Four of the finest horses were taken from his stables, Huddleston taking the best, whilst the Vice Chancellor was put upon a lame animal for the long journey south. As he left Cambridge he was jeered by papists, now anxious to express their religion, and mourned by his friends who sensed what was to follow.

It was a noble procession: the Duke of Northumberland, the Earls of Warwick and Huntingdon, Lord Hastings, three Lord Dudleys, two knighted Gates and Sir Thomas Palmer who accompanied Sandys down to incarceration in the Tower of London. After some difficulty he secured his freedom and went abroad, only to be appointed Archbishop of York once Queen Elizabeth had been crowned. Three of the rebels were beheaded, including Northumberland, and Cambridge University had lost its senior official at a stroke. But is quickly gained a new, old one. For Queen Mary released Stephen Gardiner, Bishop of

Winchester who had held that office before his own imprisonment, together with Thomas Duke of Norfolk who had been the High Steward of Cambridge before Northumberland had taken that position from him.

In September the Roman Catholic Mass was celebrated in Cambridge and next month a service in Latin was celebrated in King's College chapel. Not all the clergy were prepared to comply with the new regime, at the Round Church the curate continued to preach in English until specifically ordered to stop by the Vice-Chancellor. Catholic priests who had been in hiding were now made fellows of colleges.

And out at Sawston Queen Mary kept her promise; she allowed Sir John Huddleston to take stones from Cambridge Castle to rebuild his razed hall, though they took care to incorporate secret hiding places, or priest holes, including one beneath a tread in the main staircase, for who could be sure what the future held. Indeed within a few years there was a new Queen, Elizabeth and the Catholic religion was once more banned with the Sawston squires on the wrong side of the religious divide.

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Throughout the centuries the Roman Catholic squires of Sawston had played their part in local life without religion intruding too much. They retained a private chapel at the Hall, employing their own priest, Pickwick learned.

But they were also joint patrons of the living of Sawston church, held until a few years ago by the Rev Thomas Cautley. Not that he spent much time in the village, preferring to install poorly-paid curates who themselves lived outside the parish leaving the vicarage to be occupied by the church clerk, Joseph Brown. No wonder congregations plummeted and the church building fell into a state of disintegration.

There had been a bit of a revival when John Gibson was curate; in fact he attracted so many worshippers that there was sometimes no room for those who want to attend. So Gibson wrote to Huddleston and asked permission to use his family area in the church for the Sunday School girls during services, thus freeing more seats. It seems strange to have to approach a Catholic Squire for permission to use the established church for public worship. Well he had no option but to agree, but when Rev Cautley resigned he was in no hurry to appoint a replacement.

In the end the Lord Chancellor appointed the present vicar – again that was unusual, as both the patrons were alive and well and living in the parish. Reverend Edwin Swann Daniel is a rabid anti-papist opposed to 'popish practices' and full of hell-fire and damnation from the pulpit. Now congregations are thriving, he's building up a restoration fund to clean up the mess inside the building and is talking of installing a gallery over the tower archer to take an orchestra and singers. There's also a new Congregational Church that is attracting large numbers.

But given such a religious village, why should they have sold off their oldest symbol of Christianity?

Smith explained: "A few years ago I happened to be travelling through the village in the summer of 1815 when I found myself in the midst of a group of people, near the road leading to the church. They were holding a conversation on a grass-plot; from the centre of which rose a cross, enclosed in a small covered building, like an amphitheatre, that added not a little to the romantic appearance of the village. Towards the bottom of the southern slope of the grass-plot, propped with uncommon care, and guarded by a holy zeal from the ravages of

time, stood an ancient sycamore tree; and on the east side, to the terror of evil-doers, stood the stocks.

“I enquired what was going on and was told that they were residents who were meeting as to whether to sell the cross. Now this cross was an ornament to the village. It had escaped the frenetic rage of the puritans in the civil wars, and was said to have been erected by the Knights Templars, as the living belonged to them and it was usual for them to erect crosses on their property. From the thirteenth century public officers used to sit on this cross to administer justice but now these men were conspiring to destroy this venerable relic.

“Wishing to preserve a reminder of the old cross, I took a hasty sketch of it and having reached my home, recorded the adventures of the day in my pocket-book. Passing through the village in the following autumn, I found that the inhabitants had indeed sacrilegiously levelled the cross and sold the remnants.”

One of the locals penned a poem about it:

The Jews of old, as we've been told,
And Scriptures pure disclose,
With harden'd hearts drew lots for parts
Of our Salvator's clothes.
The modern Jews-the Sawstonites,
As harden’d as the Israelites
In ignorance still more gross,
Thinking they could no longer thrive
By Christian means, did means contrive
Drew lots, and sold the cross!

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Elliott Smith lamented the way that Sawston had changed: it used to be a village of thatched cottages, set back from the street with gardens in front of them. Mill Lane was a winding and sheltered avenue, shaded by pollard elms and ash trees, where children could play. But now more and more ugly brick houses are being built close alongside the road. It was being spoilt by the increase in industry.

Following inclosure in 1802 the whole character of the parish was transformed. Peasants who used to have their own lands now had to start working for other people or join the ranks of able-bodied paupers. But at least there was labour enough to clear the ditches and maintain the roads – and when New Road and King’s Road were constructed it brought some people good wages.

But more and more people started to move into the village – the population had doubled in the last 30 years. Many have come to work in the tannery. Thomas Evans, a Welsh parchment-maker was one of those, he soon married Elizabeth Beale, a widow, who owned the business. Then he leased some of the adjoining charity lands and erected drying lofts, splitting, friezing and grounding shops to make parchment, leather and skiver. That brought in more specialist labour – fellmongers, purers, fleshers, splitters, grounders and the rest. It was his pile of smelly skins accumulated from town butchers that regularly stank out the Cambridge market hill. While this was going on Edward Towgood, a paper manufacturer from St Neots moved into the mill house at Sawston and then bought the business from another widow, Elizabeth Martindale whose late husband had run it. He introduced steam power and had ambitions to

make it one of the leading paper-mills in the country. To do that he needed skilled labour – so now there's papermakers, millwrights, engineers, stokers and blacksmiths – most of them outsiders.

This was not all: there were the rope makers, wheelwrights, greengrocers and fruiters, shoemakers and tailors, haidressers and gardeners, brewers and publicans, glaziers and braziers, grocers and butchers –as well as ordinary agricultural labourers. Their names read like something out of one of Mr Dicken's stories – there were Jiggins, Kings and Lords, a Pitty and two Means, but there were also two Nices and two Hurrys – in fact all the village seemed to be bustling. Nor did the name always go with the job: Cornelius Skinner earned his living as an agricultural labourer. But it did seemed appropriate that John Stallan should be a ropemaker – seeing as how another member of that family had been hanged for the outbreak of arson he'd perpetrated so he could earn money as a fireman, putting them out.

But the talk in the village was of Henry Howell, a labourer who, being out of work, had asked the parish constable, William Cowell, if he could spend the night in the village cage. This was agreed and a young man named Morley was sent to open it up. Henry asked him to look after a sixpence for him until morning – he didn't want to be robbed while in the lock-up! At eight o'clock next morning his gaoler went to open up and let him out, but found him sleeping with his head next to the door. He looked so peaceful that Morley locked the door and came back at ten. This time he called his name, but as there was no response he went away again. He thought it strange and mentioned it to a man named Stubbings who went to see for himself, and found Henry stone cold dead.

At the inquest it was revealed that he'd actually been in custody from the Thursday on a charge of unlawfully exposing his person (so to speak) and had been spending the days with the constable and his nights in the cage. It was so comfortable that after he'd been discharged by Mr Hamond that he'd asked the friendly constable to allow him to stay a little longer. The jury returned a verdict of 'died by the visitation of God in a fit'

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If it was animal skins that dominated Sawston, it was frogs that were the main attraction at the village of Fowlmere. The village took its name from the great stinking lake where labourers made a good living from reed cutting, turf cutting, leech gathering and duck shooting.

There was a little rhyme about it:

Fowlmere, Fowlmere,
In the reedy fen
We got more geeses and ducks here,
Since Oi remember when.

We got some decoy poipes,
We flushed em up, and then,
Oi got such awful groipes,
Crouching down in them.

Hundreds a–welcome,
In a good noights work,

We wring em one by one,
A twist and thin a jerk.

We lood them on the punt,
Then push off pretty smart,
Sort em back and front,
And droive off in the cart.

Down the roadway,
Up to London Town,
Lying in the poulterer's,
Blue and green and brown.

But we is all in bed,
Sleeping most of the day,
For loying in the reeds,
Yew have got tew pay.

Like old Merry at Stretham they supplement their income by dealing with Cambridge undergraduates. The students are happy to pay to hire a boat for an afternoon's wildfowling. But should their sport prove unsuccessful - and the old fellow from whom they hired the boat take care that it is – why they help them escape "bein larfed at by them other young ge'mmen in college" by returning "wi' two or three leash of duck as I don't mind lettin' you have for a consideration".

Another thing that attracts naturalists from miles around are the loud croaking 'edible' frogs, known as 'Fowlmere Nightingales'. Nobody knows quite what they are – some say they're the last lingering descendants of an early British species, others that they'd been brought in by the Romans. Anyway some people will pay a good price for them.

The village has a number of hostelries, Smith continued, and each attracts its own sort of customer. The higher classes with their post chaises will stop at the Chequers, stagecoach passengers call at the Swan and those poorer folks on the stage wagons use the Black Horse. The Chequers is probably the oldest inn though it was damaged in a great fire about 200 years ago – you can see the burn marks on some of the beams. Samuel Pepys stopped here one night in 1660 and asked a serving wench to show him the old four-poster bed head decorated with angels from top to bottom. There's also some beautiful carved woodwork and the bow window at the front is adorned with a carving of the Virgin Mary – the only virgin left in the village, some say!

But Sir Peter Soame of Heydon Grange is a regular at the Black Horse – though he doesn't know much about it. He's devoted to the bottle and often comes to grief when driving his pony and trap home from Cambridge. Usually one of the stage 'wagons will pick him up and give him a lift to the Black Horse where he snores till morning. He's not a man you want to get on the wrong side of: a formidable figure in skin-fit leather breeches, he's a noted promoter of prize fights and sometimes joins in himself. There was one fight just a few weeks ago at Noon's Folly when one of the contestants was pummelled to death.

Amongst the gossip in the Fowlmere pubs one names that cropped up frequently was that of Thomas Nash of Bury Farm. It was he who had killed the fatted sheep for the village's celebration of the coronation of Queen Victoria in July when man each had a dinner and a quart of beer to take home to drink the her young majesty's health and happiness. Given what he'd been through, it was a generous gesture.

Thomas had taken on the 700-acre Bury Farm about three years earlier when the house, outbuildings and roads were a poor state and spent a lot of time and money improving them. His six children helped him about farm, getting at half-past-four to get a good morning's work done before breakfast. His wife however spent a lot of time drinking tea with the other local families - Wedds, Fullers, Beldams, Johns and Hollicks – or driving off in her carriage to dine at Shepreth or shop at Walden.

Things had seemed to be going his way until the winter of 1836. That October was very cold with deep snow so the men could do little work, November was stormy with tiles blown off roofs, and chimneys and trees blown down, and January 1837 was cold and foggy. It was then that the flu had hit. His men went down first, Thomas got it in that wet, cold February and his wife next month. There more snow in April and into May when Thomas fell ill again.

What was worse, his lambs began to die, five or six every day, till he feared the flock seemed ruined. What were left got out of the fold: 20 were worried by dogs and 15 lambs killed. It was now, when things seemed as bad as ever they could get, that the sheep stealers struck. Despite his illness Thomas went out to investigate; he spotted footprints in the snow and followed the track to Shepreth where he found old Sampson and Coulton with nearly two sides of mutton at their houses.

They were hauled off to court, but the magistrates took pity on them: well there were nine children in one family and eight in the other and they were all starving. So instead of watching their fathers hang from the gallows on Cambridge Castle Hill, the children had waited hours beside the road for a glimpse of the coach that conveyed them manacled in chains to commence their journey to ten years transportation in Botany Bay. It was these men who had tried to escape as the coach crawled up the hills at Barkway – an incident Pickwick had heard about on his journey to Cambridge (can it only have been days before?)

They had been taken first to old wooden warships – or prison hulks - where they were kept in chains and rowed to work every day in the dockyards while they waited for weeks before being transported to Australia. Everybody knew that convicts faced appalling conditions on the voyage to the other side of the world, being flogged with a cat-o-nine-tails for the slightest misdemeanour. There they faced many years of harsh treatment in the penal colonies. At the end of their sentence they would be free, but would never see their wives or families again.

But was it really as bad as it was painted? No, not according to John Bowtell who had been reading a convict's diary that had been recently received at the Cambridge University Library. He led Pickwick and Smith down Senate House Passage, picking their way through the piles of brick and stone being used to construct the new library and into the relative calm of the old building. There they found a seat at a table while the librarian scuttled off to a distant recess before returning with a manuscript account, quite well written – though with somewhat quaint spelling. It was headed 'An account of the treatment of convicts, and how they are dispos'd of in New South Wales' and had been compiled by a convict named Mellish. He had returned

from transportation, and being again committed to gaol, set about describing what he had seen for the amusement of the gaoler's wife. Pickwick settled down to read.

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Mellish the convict’s recollections of his transportation to New South Wales made interesting reading. His story started with his transfer from the prison hulks to the vessel that was to take him to Australia: “When they first leave the hulks, every man pulls of his hulk dress, and has given him a fresh dress, jacket and trousers; then goes on board the Bay ship, there every man is examined by the doctor. If he thinks any of them is not fit for the voyage, they are sent back to the hulks and others sent in lieu of them. Then all their names is called over and every man sent down between decks, every man in double irons, but very light ones.

“Then the doctor and one of the mates comes down, and puts six men in a birth, each birth about three - I may say four - yards wide, with a flock bed and two blankets for each man. There is two tier of births, one above an other, all round the ship, with a few cradles in the centre of the ship, for old men or men with bad legs. There is an hospital in the same deck, a small place partitioned off, and if any of the men is sick, or in a dangerous state, they are put there, and every attention paid to them. I understand the doctor has a guinea for every one he lands in New South Wales alive. The decks is scraped and washed every morning and all the births kept very clean. Before each birth is a bench, which goes all round the ship.

“Every man goes on deck twice a day, about 30 or 40 at the time; each man takes up with him his bed and blankets, likewise the doctor takes care that every man gets a good wash when he is on deck.

“As to provisions there is not much reason to find fault. On Sundays, plumb pudding with suet in it, about a pound to each man, likewise a pound of beef; Monday, pork a pound and peas with it; Tuesday, beef and rice; Wednesday, same as on Sunday; Thursday, same as Monday; Friday, beef and rice and pudding; Saturday, pork only, for breakfast oatmeal boiled, with about two ozs. of sugar to each man. There is two men appointed for to cook for the ship's company, I mean the convicts; and those men, if you want tea or coffee, or any thing else boiled, they will do it for you, but they expect a little something for their trouble. Meals are got very unregular some time in rough weather Three pints of water allowed to each man and half-pound of biscuit a day. Many captains won’t allow smoking between deck, but as much as you please on deck.

“No knives allowed between decks, only at dinner times; then there is a man appointed to distribute two or three case knives and forks to each birth, then as soon as dinner is over, collects all together again. Every night just at dusk half-pint of port wine to each man; two men appointed to wash your linen.

“Captain as soon as he gets out of sight of land, in general single irons about six men a day, till they are all single ironed, I mean those that conduct themselves. The only place they stop at is Riodiginaro, some time a week and some times not so long, as the captain thinks proper; a very pretty view of the town; plenty of bum boats comes along side, with fruit and tobacco. Some gentlemen comes down between decks with the captain, when they go ashore they send a deal of fruit on board for the convicts, oranges and lemons and limes, every day if its in the season. Captain and mates in general purchase tobacco and rum and sugar; tobacco 1½ d. [A PENNY HALFPENNY] a pound; rum and sugar very cheap.

“Convicts are allowed to purchase anything but spirits; coffee 1½ d [A PENNY HALFPENNY] a pound; sugar 2½ d [TWOPENCE HALFPENNY] lb.[A POUND]; tea very good at about 3s. 6d. lb. [THREE SHILLINGS AND SIXPENCE A POUND]. Convicts has

served to them, while they are in the harbour, fresh beef and broth, with a deal of garden stuff with it; beef very thin, no fat on it, very bad indeed."
For men imprisoned for stealing a sheep to feed a starving family these provisions must have seemed generous.

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As the convicts' ship neared Australia, so conditions were relaxed, as Mellish's journal described: "The captain begins to knock off the iron's from convicts' legs, about six a day, according to the behaviour of the men, till they are all off. The next land we see is the Bay, and as soon as a ship is in sight, a flag is hoisted at a place called South Head, the mouth of the harbour, which gives the intelligence to Sydney. Then the pilot comes on board, and when we get about a quarter way up the harbour, the harbour-master comes on board for the Governor's dispatches, and remains on board till we come to an anchor.

"Then the captain, the doctor, and harbour-master goes to Government-House, with the dispatches and newspapers; then in less than ten minutes there is no less than 30 or 40 boats full of people round the ship. All hands make their way on deck, but none of the boat people is allowed to come on board, but close alongside. Then all the cry is, 'Who is come?' 'Is there anybody from Cambridge?' and so on - most of them knows somebody. Then as soon as they have got all the information they can they go away, and in a little time come again and bring some fresh provisions and garden stuff for those that they know - which is a very great treat, I can assure you, after living four or five months on salt meat.

"The reason the governor won't allow any one to go on board is, that they should not tell or give them any information respecting the rules and ways of the colony. For instance, if a man is a good mechanic they will tell them not to say what trade they are. Then when they come on shore they are not thought so much of by government. Then again others will tell their friends on board, to say they are some trade or other, with the view of keeping them from being sent up the country.

"After they have been in the harbour four days, every man gets a fresh supply of clothing given him. I got two blue jackets, two pair of trousers, two pair of shoes, two handkerchiefs, two waistcoats, two pair stockings, a hat, three cotton stripe shirts, a fresh bed and two very good blankets, all new. Not a single thing of what has been in use on board is allowed to go on shore.

"When that is done, every man is clean shaved, washed, and his hair cut in a moderate way. Then the Superintender of Government Works and the Commissary General with his clerk, comes on board. The men's names are all called over, and as they answer their names they pass by one by one. The Superintender asks have you any complaints to make in respect to your treatment on the voyage? If they have any they relate it; and so on with every one. And if there is a general complaint, the Captain or Doctor gets a very severe reprimand by the Governor. I have known one or two captains to have been tried for it; but I think it's only a matter of form, for they in general win.

"When all hands have answered their names, they all get into boats and goes on shore. Then the town is all of an uproar; a deal of shaking hands and so on as people meet up with friends or relations that's been sent out there previously. Once all their boxes and bags and bundles are all got on shore together, a few soldiers is left to guard them, or else they would not remain there long!

"Then all hands walk two by two into a large square where they stand as they do in Cambridge prison yard - only two deep. Then the Governor, Superintender and doctor comes

and the Governor addresses them, by saying what a fine fruitful country they are come to, and what he will do for them if their conduct merits it. Likewise he tells them if they find themselves anywise dissatisfied with their employ to go immediately to the magistrate of the district, and he will see him righted. When that part of the ceremony is performed the Governor and dignitaries leave, after complimenting the Doctor a little. Then they are all left to the Superintender to dispose of the convicts as he thinks proper."

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Arraigned in the heat of an Australian quay, Mellish had stood with the other newly-arrived convicts as they prepared to learn their fate. There were two classes of men that were given special treatment. One were thieves and they were eagerly sought, as Mellish explained: "It is very seldom that any thieves are sent up the country, as most of the gentlemen reside in Sydney, and would sooner take for his servant a man that he knows has been a regular thief at home, than one of those barn door gentlemen. Well he knows he can depend on them, for they won't see no tricks played with his master's property, nor play none himself. You never hear tell of a thief getting into any trouble. But there is very few thieves get transported: when I went, out of 200 men, there were but five regular thieves amongst them"

But skilled tradesmen were less likely to confess to their past activities: "If the Superintender knows he has a good trade, he will keep him for Government – but the trick is to get yourself sent up the country to farming work. Australian farmers can apply for men to work for them. You can get plenty of pretended friends to do this if they know you have money or anything that will fetch money.

"Then you live with the master and work on his farm. You start at seven or eight in the morning, go home to breakfast at nine o'clock and then continue till three in the afternoon. We have to so much 'Government' work to do – but a man as can work can get a Government day's work done in four hours and then can work for anybody else and get paid for his labour as a free man – you can earn £20 a year".

Those not lucky enough to be selected were distributed by the magistrate as he thought proper. "The Superintender begins first to pick out 80 men to go to Parramatta, some fit for farmers, and some for different trades; the remainder he will dispose of in Sydney, some for grooms, some coachmen, some to one trade and some to another. Those that is for up the country, their names are all taken down again, then marched away two by two down to the wharf. Each man takes his box or bundles, and all gets into a large boat and away up the river to Parramatta. When they arrive there they are all put into goal while morning.Then those for Windsor starts off with a cart to carry their luggage, and those for Georges River at same time, down a different road. When they arrive there they are disposed of in the same way, bread and meat served out to them at each place.

"Those that work directly for the Government meet at six o'clock in summer and eight in winter and sleep in the goal at night. On Saturday they work while 10 o'clock, then one man out of a mess of six goes to the store for their provisions. They get seven pound of good fresh beef a week, or five pounds of English salt pork – very good; 12 lb. flour and one sugar to each man every Saturday. Garden stuff is very plentiful, can have it for asking for including very fine potatoes.

"Twice a year convicts are served out with what we call slops - a good strong blue or grey jacket and trousers and a pair of shoes. They are not compelled to wear them if they don't think proper; and once in three years are served with a good bed tick, two blankets, and a rug. On Sunday, every man must go to church in the morning, they fall in two deep in a very long line in front of the church. Then the Superintender with his Clerk walks down and asks the overseer if his men are all there, and if he sees any man not clean shaved, or with a dirty shirt

on, he calls a constable and sends him to goal while Monday morning. If he catches him a second time he sends him to goal every day after he has done his work for a week. If any man is absent from church without leave, he is treated in a similar way; and if that won't do, they sometimes get what we call a civil check, 25 lashes, which cures them in general the first dressing."

It seemed to Pickwick that the punishment for skipping church was somewhat excessive – it made that metered out to undergraduates missing compulsory college chapel seem positively lenient

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What happened if a transported convict reoffended whilst in Australia, Pickwick wondered. Well according to Mellish, who had been sent there and served his time, the answer was simple:

"If a man commits any crime in Australia, he his dealt with exactly the same as in England. If found guilty of any thing which won't take their lives, they get a sentence according to the crime. Those for short sentence, any thing under seven years, are sent into the 'gaol gang'*;* their clothing is very dark brown jackets and trousers, with one side of them white, double ironed very light.

"If they get more than seven year for a crime, they are sent to a place called the Coal River, about 400 miles by water, some for seven years, 14 years, or life. There they work at getting coals up to their middle in water. Then if they transgress again, they are sent by the magistrate up to the lime burners. They make lime out of oyster shells; they can't stand that work long, for it is very unwholesome and gets into their eyes and blinds them. If they commit any murder, which is very frequently the case, they arc sent to Sydney and tried for it, and if found guilty, they are taken back, and as near to the spot as possible executed. A great many murders are committed, and in general by the Irish people."

But it was not just men who were transported; women too paid the price for their crimes, only for them conditions were somewhat different.

"When the female convicts first arrive in the Colony as they leave the ship get a kind of a bed gown, a brown stuff, with a stuff petticoat, shoes, shifts, a bead, and two blankets as well as some thread and needles. But I never saw any woman with the government clothing on. It is left to the Superintendent to dispose of them as he thinks proper. Almost any person can take a woman of the store, if they are agreeable to go. If not, she is sent up to the factory at Parramatta, and there will be employed in picking wool, carding wool, spinning and making a sort of coarse cloth, woollen*,* such as the boat gang wear. They work from eight o'clock in the morning till three in the afternoon, then go where they think proper while morning.

"If they neglect their work, they get confined in the goal at night, and if commit any robbery, they are sent to the coal river. There is no work to speak of for them to do there so they are made to wear a steel collar –like the Bishop of Ely uses in his gaol"

As they laboured in the Australian heat the women dreamed of freedom and there were ways of gaining that: "I have known women when they are at the factory - I do mean to say, very nice young women as you could wish to see, actually marry an old man, as ragged as possible; and perhaps he lives 20 or 30 miles up the country, and no house perhaps within five or six miles of him, right up in the bush, where you can see nothing but the trees. But there is

a policy in that: he is a free man, and when they are married it makes her free. Then after she has stopped a day or two, she will make some excuse - which a woman is never at a loss for - to come down to Sydney. She will get what money she can of him, the old fool but don't return again. She is now her own mistresses; can dress herself up and go to the flash houses, and at night to the dancing houses, and be happy".

But that happiness might not last long: "Very frequently the constables will go in those houses at Sydney, if they see a strange girl, and she cannot produce a pass, or a certificate of her marriage, he will put her in the goal and cause her to be sent back to the factory. If it's her first offence, it is sometimes looked over; but if she runs away again, she is confined in the goal, and a log of wood chained to her leg."

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Sitting in the Cambridge University Library, Pickwick continued his perusal of the journal of a convict, newly returned from New South Wales.

Sometimes, he read, both husband and wife were transported together, but they did not have to stay together: "If a woman's husband or man is in the country, they are not compelled to live with each other if they don't think proper. But if the woman lives with another man, and the husband wants her himself, if he can bring any two people to say they know they was married in England, then the man can demand his wife".

Inevitably where men and women mingled, whether inside wedlock or out of it, then there were often consequences

"There is a very fine institution for orphan children, females, at Parramatta, as fine a stone building as ever you saw but there is seldom more than 50 or 60 girls in at once. They live very well and are all clothed alike in a very neat manner. They are never allowed out only when all together, mostly of an evening two by two. When they are fit for service, if any respectable family are in want of a servant, by making a proper application they can have one of them. They are indentured for three years, and if anyone gets married after they have served the time, they must first make application to the Governor, and if he approves of it, the girl is entitled to a 30-acre farm and three cows. They can marry a prisoner if they like - and if the Governor considers him an industrious man - which makes him a free man in the colony.

"Its very rare that girls stop their time out, particularly so if they are any way good looking. They are most of them very fond of fine dress, but poor creatures about a house - one European woman can do as much work as two or three of them".

The men had longer to wait for the chance of release: "A convict, after he has served his master eight years without complaint, is entitled to a ticket of leave, that is to go anywhere and work for himself, but receives nothing out of the stores. The regular way of obtaining a ticket of leave, is in first place to get a petition signed by your master, the parson of the town you belong to, and by the magistrates of the same place. The Governor receives petitions the first Monday in the month, then you take or send your petition to Government House. The next first Monday you must go yourself, and the Governor if he thinks proper will sign it; and if the man conducts himself for a few years longer, 4 or 5, the Governor will give him an emancipation, by petitioning him in the same way as before; and that will make him quite free in the country.

There was another way: to go out to Botany Bay. "If a man and his wife wish to go to the Botany Bay, he must make application to the Secretary of State and get an order to be sent out free of expense, in the first ship. When they land, they go to the Governor who can get him 30 acres of land measured out, gives him two government men on the stores, gives him saws,

axes, nails, and all sorts of seed sufficient to crop what land he has ready. He also gets two cows, a sow, a mare, six sheep, and two working bullocks all on the stores for three years, after which he must return everything again. But if the tools are worn out or broke - if he returns any part of each it will do. As for the beast three young calves will do, and for the mare an old pony, and so on. But if it don't suit him to return any of those things at the expiration of the time, he can petition the Governor to show cause why, and sometimes never pays at all."

A hard-working convict, with a bit of luck, could earn enough money to be able to return to England quite the gentleman. Mellish himself had returned home by working as a servant to a convict couple now returning in far more comfort than they had experienced on the journey out. All in all a convict's life was nothing like as bad as Pickwick had been led to believe!

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Pickwick was delighted as John Bowtell took him a tour of the University Library housed in that institution's oldest building with its magnificent carved and domed ceilings, before it was changed forever by the building of the new one.

Although known as the Public Library it was a resource strictly for scholars and had served their needs since the thirteenth-century. But it had little in the way of old books. By 1473 the library had numbered some 330 volumes, two years later another 200 were added but by the 1570s only 180 remained. Later although books continued to be added, others had been discarded once they were considered old and out of date. Many more were pillaged after various visiting scholars had been allowed to explore for themselves and left Cambridge with more than memories.

When Bowtell first knew the library it had occupied two mean rooms of moderate size. In the first, on the left-hand side, were the printed books, very badly arranged – in fact in utter confusion. There was also an important collection of manuscripts, which could normally only be seen when the librarian was present. Bowtell knew their hiding places and offered to produce them for Pickwick's perusal but the thick dust which covered them, combined with the banging and clattering of the builders outside, quite destroyed any inclination for peaceful study. His eyes did alight however on a number of ancient coins in a deep drawer, unlocked and left open – though they too were covered with dust.

But dust was an important preservative much used by college libraries too, as Bowtell had discovered. In Peterhouse library the manuscripts were so buried in dust that the librarian was forced to send for a towel to wear as a pinafore so that scholars might not dirty themselves too much. At Magdalene the books were so overgrown with mould that nobody would want to touch them anyway.

Caius College library was worse. Here the manuscripts were kept in a garret under the roof which had its own security system. The top step was so thick in pigeon dung that anybody entering would be sure to soil his shoes, while inside dust lay thick on the floor and nothing could be touched without it billowing up and settling again on readers' hair and eyes as well as clothes. It was a lesson Pembroke should have learned for some rogue had managed to cut out all the golden initials from a manuscript - doubtless to be sold off. This was not something that Corpus Christi could allow to happen. Their library contained a magnificent collection of early manuscripts bequeathed by Archbishop Matthew Parker in the 1500s. He had known of Cambridge's record for caring for its treasures: Thomas Markaunt had donated 76 volumes in 1439 but 150 years later only three were still there. So Parker ruled that if a single item of his was lost or misplaced then the entire legacy would pass to Gonville and Caius, together with an important collection of plate. It was this latter stipulation that may have carried weight for

Corpus had been very careful ever since and it needed three keys to unlock the doors to even get into the room that housed the collection

At the Public Library the volumes had been chained and before he left at night the Librarian was to "view all the Bookes, and if any be left open or out of their due place, he shall safely close them up, and set them in their places". Although scholars could have access they had to be quick workers: for the rule proclaimed "that none tarry at one booke above one hour". The regulations had been relaxed in 1696 when borrowing was permitted. But there were restrictions: the only books which could be taken out were those not more easily acquired from a friend or College Library and even then it needed the permission of the Vice-chancellor. Only one book could be borrowed at a time by the same person, but the authorities were wise enough to add that if more were needed the reader should get a friend to take it out in his own name. They could have the book for a month, though it could be renewed, with special permission but then came the penalty: "if ye Borrower forgetts or neglects to send or bring home ye Booke he is not to take it amis if ye under Library Keeper calls for it, and expects somewhat for his Paines"

Some of these rules – especially the one that brought in some additional income might still be acted upon to advantage, librarian Bowtell felt.

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It was John Moore, Bishop of Ely, who'd unknowingly transformed the Cambridge University Library, as Bowtell explained. Moore had started life as the son of a Leicestershire ironmonger and come up to Clare Hall where he'd proved himself an able student and in due course had been awarded a Fellowship. For most people this brought financial stability, for Moore it was different. His family's finances were somewhat precarious and once elected a Fellow, John had to repay the fees his father had invested in his education.

He took Holy Orders, ministered at various parishes in London and become a royal chaplain before being consecrated Bishop of Norwich in 1691 and translated to the cathedral at Ely sixteen years later. He'd been Bishop for seven years before being buried in the cathedral under an elegant monument. He left another monument in his library, a magnificent collection of scarce and valuable books and manuscripts. The question was: what should happen to it?

The Earl of Oxford had sent his librarian out to inspect it but the collection was in a mess and the price of £8,000 demanded by the executor too exorbitant. The Librarian of the Bodleian Library, Oxford also had a look, but it was more than his budget would stand. In the end it was the King, George I, who took it on, though at a much-reduced price. But he really did not want it in any of his palaces, so he offered it to Cambridge instead.

It was something that could not be turned down – not least because it proved they were in Royal favour. A wag from Oxford University expressed his views in a perceptive verse:

The King, observing with judicious eyes,
The state of both his universities,
To Cambridge books he sent, as well discerning
How much that loyal body wanted learning.

But the King might have been forgiven if he'd changed his mind after what happened when he paid his first visit a couple of years later, in 1717. It had started well: the Royal entourage had arrived by coach from Newmarket to find all the church bells ringing and the streets filled with country folk who'd flocked to glimpse his Royal Majesty. He'd enjoyed the Latin orations in King's College chapel that were an essential part of such a visit – in fact some folk

speculated that, being German born and bred he probably understood Latin better than the English language.

Next he was to dine at Trinity College, where a fine feast had been prepared. The Master and Fellows had ensured everything was ready: paintwork had been freshened up, the Great Court swept, the flowerbeds weeded and the fountain made presentable. They gathered by the great King's Gate and waited. And waited. And waited.

Once the Chapel proceedings were over it was the Vice Chancellor, William Grigg, Master of Clare Hall who was to escort George to Trinity. But William thought he would give the King the opportunity of a glimpse of his own college en route, so instead of going down King's Parade he led the party past Clare to the Queen's Gate of Trinity. To his consternation, on arrival they found the door closed but remembering how a new Master had to gain admission to his college by knocking, they knocked. Only nobody answered. Then the truth dawned – they were locked out. Leaving the King and his courtiers standing in the dingy narrow alleyway that bore every indication of its colloquial name, Piss-Pot Lane, one of the University party ran off to the main gate. But he found that most of Cambridge had gathered outside, anxious to view the pageantry, and not at all inclined to make way for some begowned academic. Finally he fought his way through the crowd and imparted the terrible news to the Master, Dr Bentley.

While a porter was sent running off to the side gate to let the King in, the College bigwigs made their way as quickly as they could with some sense of decorum. The two parties met midway across the Great Court for a somewhat strained welcome. Then the King was taken off to inspect the Wren Library while hungry dignitaries packed into the Dining Hall for a feast fit for a monarch. There they waited for their Royal guest-of-honour. And waited, and waited. But the King never came – he'd had enough of being on public show; instead he ate with a few of his courtiers in the Master's Lodge, before heading back to Newmarket.

It was a visit neither would forget, but neither would want remembered. Pickwick noted it down.

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When Bishop John Moore's magnificent library had first arrived in Cambridge in 1715 the University had agonised over where to put it. For a start it had been stored on the ground floor of the Old Schools while academics and architects argued over the building that would eventually house them. In the months that followed librarians tried to discover just what they'd inherited. Some of the manuscripts related to Luffield Priory, Northamptonshire and others must have originally been in the great monastic libraries that had been split up following the reformation. In the end they mixed them in with those already in the University Library and now nobody could remember what had come from whom.

At least the books were easier to identify and special shelves had been made to hold them. There were books on law and medicine, some of which had originally come from the library of the physician of King James I. Many others had been liberated from the libraries of the clergy in his diocese – well if the Bishop expressed an interest in some old book and offered a volume of his own sermons in exchange, what country vicar was going to dare to refuse?

But one thing was certain: the bequest had transformed the motley collection of books that had previously comprised Cambridge's University Library. Why they'd not previously had a

copy of Isaac Newton's *Principita* or *Opticks*, even though he'd studied at Trinity College, nor Bentley's definitive edition of *Horace*, published by the University Press in 1711.

All that had changed with the passing of the Copyright Act in 1814 for now the University had the right to receive a free copy of every book published in the country – not that it had actually to accept them. Here Bowtell produced a copy of Pickwick's own 'Papers' which caused the author to swell with pride at the thought that his own modest production should be housed amongst such other great treasures. The pride was soon deflated as Bowtell explained that it would probably never be consulted, as it would be years before such a publication was added to the library catalogues. As more and more material poured in it meant extra work in accessioning and shelving – another headache for the library staff.

And headaches were one of the problems facing the present University Librarian, John Lodge, made worse following an outbreak of cholera he'd suffered following a trip to Bangor five years earlier. He was frequently trying to get rid of the pain on long constitutional walks with his friend Joseph Romilly, the registrary of the University. He also took time off from the library to give him a hand when needed - as in June 1837 when two major events coincided - the proclamation of the new Queen Victoria and the opening of Midsummer Fair at the same time as one of Romilly's trips down to London.

And Lodge had other problems: his stepmother – who he hated – was proving particularly tiresome so he'd accepted a living in Anderby, Lincolnshire – one of those nasty red-brick churches in the worst stile of 1760. Then he'd had to take time to sit for his portrait by Fred Walmisley - it showed him in his academic robes with a few old books and the new University Library building behind – but he did not like the final result. Added to all that there were problems in his own college, Magdalene. They had become paranoid ever since a porter had answered a ring at the great gate just before midnight in 1791 only to find himself staring down the barrel of a pistol. The gunman, an undergraduate, demanded to be taken to the rooms of another student but instead the President, Rev Thomas Kerrich, was summoned from his bed and persuaded the lad to surrender his weapon, which was found not to be loaded. The University had hushed up the affair, the boy had gone on to become a priest in Norfolk, and Kerrich appointed University Librarian. He too built up an own extensive collection of antiquarian papers which, on his death, he had bequeathed to the British Museum, the Society of Antiquaries, the Fitzwilliam Museum – anywhere except the University Library!

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So what was it like to try and read in the University Library? It was an atmosphere of studious calm, with eminent dons in their university gowns seriously perusing some ancient manuscript or venerable volume in a peace so deep that the drop of a single spectacle lens would reverberate right up to the domed roof high above.

Or was it … well, not quite. For one thing there were numerous visitors being shown around, their guide having to raise their voices to impart valuable information to their guests, many of whom seemed to be at least half-deaf. Several were accompanied by some pretty young niece whose gowns rustled noisily and whose perfumes almost overpowered the aroma of musty books and even the unwashed clothes of academics whose colleges boasted smoky fireplaces but few baths.

Many of these ancient gentlemen sat in silent contemplation, apparently immersed in their study, but the astute observer might notice how their rheumy eyes were constantly on the move, taking in everything that was happening around them.

Others were engrossed in conversation with another begowned figure, enjoying the opportunity to make contact with somebody who was not one of the small conclave of fellows they were forced to endure each time they dined in their college. There was little enough opportunity to practice such social interaction and they soon ran out of convivialities, but fortunately any discussion would invariably be interrupted by excessively-loud 'shhs' from dark recesses between bookcases where so little light percolated that any reading was surely impossible.

All this was to be expected in a library, but this one was different. Pickwick shuddered when the very floor shook as a portly don, still suffering from an excess of port the evening before and his mind in some earlier century, blundered into a library-ladder on the top of which a be-wigged figure was stretching for a book on the uppermost shelf. There was the sound of the initial impact, the scrape of the steps as they were pushed across the floorboards, the exclamation of terror and the multitude of crashes as books, spectacles and wig plunged to the ground.

High above the arthritic hands of the reader were still grasping the shelves which for a while held his weight as his feet flailed frantically for a foothold on the valuable volumes below. Just as it seemed as if he had succeeded the great bookcase itself started to tilt, leaning further and further until the forces of gravity took over completely and the very heart of Cambridge seemed to miss a beat in the cacophony of confusion that followed.

Now all was panic as some readers rushed to help extricate the crushed figure buried in the mound of paper, while others rushed for the outside world and their own college – now with something to amuse their fellow Fellows. More readers merely turned the next page and let out even louder 'shhs'

Into this maelstrom one figure strode manfully; John Bowtell, under-librarian, could see at a glance what needed to be done: this volume needed to be rebacked, that one would have to be completely rebound. There was plenty of work here for a bookbinder and Bowtell's firm was the best in Cambridge. The small salary he earned by toiling in the depths of the University Librarian would be supplemented handsomely by the income this one incident would bring. It was not a bad day at all.

Pickwick and Elliott Smith took their leave and turned instead to seek a more relaxing place to read – the coffee shop.

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Elliott Smith led Pickwick away from the noise and bustle of the University Library where the dust was still settling from the collapsed books and out into the fresh air. They left behind the building site surrounding the Old Schools and went back on to King's Parade where they turned right and strode purposefully, avoiding ambling strangers with their guidebooks.

Both were in need of a cup of coffee – not as easy a beverage to acquire now as it had been just a few years earlier. Oxford, it appeared, claimed the privilege of having the first coffee shop in England, opened by Jacob, a Jew, in St. Peter's Parish about 1650. Two years later one had been set up in London by Pasquet, a Greek servant of a merchant named Edwards and proved so successful as to arouse the hostility of ale-house keepers, who eventually succeeded in driving this foreigner out of the town. However by 1657 there were over 2,000 coffee houses in the London area.

But the new beverage which, as Bacon recorded 'comforteth the brain and heart, and helpeth digestion' had too many friends to be denied. William Harvey, discoverer of the circulation of the blood, who entered Gonville and Caius College, Cambridge in 1593, boasted that he "was

wont to drink coffee before coffee-houses were fashionable in London". Samuel Pepys recorded in his diary in 1663 “Went to Covent Garden to-night, I stopped at the great coffee-house there, where I never was before; where Dryden the poet (I knew at Cambridge), and all the wits of the town, and Mr. Harris and Mr. Hoole of our college". This was Will's Coffee-House, where Dryden had a chair reserved for him near the fire-place in winter and one was carried on to the balcony for him in summer.

It had not taken long for coffee-houses to arrive in Cambridge; probably the first was set up on Trumpington Street by Henry Kirk. It seemed destined to failure until he hit on the idea of taking newspapers. It quickly became the custom for undergraduates, after chapel, to spend hours reading them and discussing their contents so Henry took to opening on a Sunday as well, till he was taken to an ecclesiastical court and fined.

He also incurred the wrath of the University who complained that the scholars being so greedy after news (which was none of their business), they neglected all for it. It was very rare for any of them to go directly to his chamber after prayers without doing his suit at the coffee-house ‘which is a vast loss of time grown out of a pure novelty, for who can apply close to a subject with his head full of the din of a coffee house?’

In 1664 a decree was issued that any universityman going to a coffee-house without his tutor's leave should be punished. Then the University tried to shut them down completely, only giving way after traders in tea and coffee launched a petition. Senior academics also came to their defence claiming that “to drink in the Taverns was scandalous; to be seen in an Alehouse most unbeseeming; but to sit idling away their time in a Coffee-House. . . that employment is without the verge of reprehension”

Further restrictions followed: any university- men found in a coffee-house betwixt the hours of nine and noon would be fined ten shillings for each offence and any coffee-house keeper serving any universitymen with wine punch or any other strong liquor after eleven o'clock at night would be fined £5 for the first offence, £10 for the second, and be deprived of his licence for a third one.

But with coffee houses serving liquor so public houses started serving coffee, opening their own rooms like that at the Little Rose, to which Pickwick was being led. They had even issued their own tokens in 1658, one worth a halfpenny showing a hand pouring coffee into one of four cups on a table. Not that a halfpenny would go far in the Little Rose now!

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Seated in the Little Rose, Trumpington Street, Pickwick cast his eyes about the other coffee drinkers. They seemed to be a most sober group of gentlemen but one who stood out was an elderly man wearing a most unlikely ancient wig who was complaining bitterly about the cup of hot liquid that had been provided for him. It did not taste like it should: coffee should be as black as soot and taste like soot – that was the drink that was good both for digestion and mirth.

In the old days, he lamented there’d been plenty of choice. There’d been the Greek’s and Dick’s, Tom's and Clapham's. There was the one beside the Gate of Humility and the Union coffee house opposite the Round Church where debate once got so heated that a senior fellow of Corpus had struck out at a fellow drinker and been fined £100 for his pains. There had been less passion at the Rainbow coffee-house, which was kept by women, or the place where the Old Maids met – a club comprised of senior dons from St John’s college who met for a chat and a pipe. In other shops men gathered to play chess or read books – indeed the Bull Book Club had been formed in just such an establishment.

They were frequented more by Fellows and Masters of Arts than by undergraduates. At Dockerell's the higher echelons of the University had occupied the upper rooms, the bachelors and undergraduates the lower part. That was the place, particularly in the morning and after three o'clock in the afternoon, where once could meet the chief professors and doctors, who read the papers over a cup of coffee and a pipe of tobacco, and conversed on all subjects. In fact a man might pick up more useful knowledge at coffee-houses than at the universities.

But the one that occupied the old gentleman's affection was the one that used to stand beside Emmanuel college, where you could get your new wig at the same time. It had been kept by an interesting character, John Delaport. Pickwick could sense a story coming on:

Back then John Delaport had been a peruke maker in London, offering hair of all sorts, both raw and curled at a good price. He'd been making good money – but twice found himself in the Old Bailey. The first occasion had been in October 1748 when he'd accused Francis Herbertson of stealing a pound-and-a-half of his human hair, worth ten shillings. The matter had come to light after Herbertson had taken the hair to another wigmaker, Smith, claiming he'd got it cheap from a peruke-maker who'd fallen on bad times. He wanted five shillings an ounce for it – a big discount on the usual price of twelve. It seemed too good a bargain to be right, so Smith arranged to meet him at the *Gentleman and Porter* in Temple Bar to conclude the sale. Instead he'd gone to Delaport's where the journeyman had immediately recognised it – he'd other strands that matched. Together they'd accosted Herbertson in who'd come up with some cock-and-bull story. The evidence had seemed cast-iron – but the jury had disagreed and the man walked free.

The next case had been far more worrying. In April 1749 Delaport been returning from Cambridge alone when, at Islington, he overtook an ill-looking fellow on foot with a very large stick in his hand. John clapped spurs to his horse to get past but then saw two other men about 40 yards ahead of him, one on the right hand and the other on the left. They ran directly towards his horse, one had a cutlass, the other a pistol, which he snapp'd and bid him stop.

His horse went from under him and he fell into a ditch; the men had pulled him out, then demanded his money. They took his silver and a little canvas bag with some French sixpences, together with his watch in its gold case. At this point another man on horseback galloped up, John had called out - but he was another of the villains with a great club in his hand who swore he would beat his brains out if he spoke another word.

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It could be hair-raising, being a wig-maker, as Pickwick was discovering. John Delaport had been returning to London from Cambridge when he'd been set upon at Islington and knocked off his horse. But at least it had given him something to talk to his customers about as the old man – surely wearing the threadbare remains of one of his creations – now told. The three men had taken him about 40 yards into the field and started to go through every stitch of his clothing. They even found the little private pocket where he carried his two rings, one gold set with diamonds, the other gold with a picture of the Prince of Wales. They also took a pair of silver wrought buckles, tore off his spurs, the gold buttons from his sleeves, a handkerchief and a cravat from his neck.

It was not the end: then they robbed him of his coat, green velvet waistcoat, hanger, wig and silver laced hat before tying him up and left him sitting beside the road. It was a quarter of an hour before he escaped and made his way to Islington.

But John was not one to let them get away with in. He placed reward notices and a man came up with a hanger and belt that he'd got from a man who lived in a court in Petticoat Lane. So he got a search warrant and took two or three of servants with him to investigate. They first thing they found was some powder-horns and two loaded pistols. Then they came across a box and inside was his own wig – the one he'd made, hair by hair. There was no way the villains could escape such damning evidence. The gang were soon rounded up and confessed every thing. They were tried at the Old Bailey, found guilty and sentenced to death.

But John had had enough, he decided to seek a quieter life in Cambridge – although there may have been another motive for the move. For he'd got married he found it expedient to get his female assistant, Ann Lawley – who'd lived with him several years – out of the big city. He set her up in a wig warehouse which he called 'The Lock of Hair' in St Andrew's Street.

A few years later John followed her up to Cambridge and opened up a coffee room in one of the houses nearby. But it did more than serve coffee. He started to encourage conversation amongst his customers, but not in English, as an old advertisement revealed: "Different languages (French in particular) will be one of the principal studies, and made easy and familiar by conversation". The prospect of speaking French in a garden was attractive, but there would be more. "Occasional dissertations and harangues will be made on the different follies and extravagancies of mankind, where every gentleman so inclined will have an opportunity of descanting on each and every subject which his talents or genius leads him to."

He sought to attract and mock all classes: "the manners and follies of each will be exposed. Apish pride, foppish vanity in youth, artful craft, cunning hypocrisy in the worldly money-getting man, ostentatious over-bearing pride, vainglory, impotency, lust, and avarice in old-age, will in their turns be properly exposed and dissected". Those attending must be prepared to be mocked: "therefore the haughty, morose, revengeful, proud man, with the sneaking, foppish, squeaking fribble, or the cruel, surly, office-bearing tyrant's company is not desired, unless duly prepared to see their foibles exposed in a mirror. None but the free, generous, debonair and gay, are desired to attend"

He fitted up the coffee-room in style with prints, drawings, and emblematical devices which encouraged innocency and virtue "by exposing vice and the folly of intemperance, with the ill effects of lust, pride, ambition, and that worst of demons, cruel revenge, or ignorantly going to law without reason or evidence". Perhaps there had been some personal reason for such rulings, Pickwick pondered.

There might be spirited debate, there would be no spirituous liquors but instead harmless lacedaemonian broth, and invigorating chocolate, comforting cakes with cooling tarts and jellies together with the best of tea, with rolls and butter, at sixpence per head. And to top it all off there'd be a library of books and musical instruments for those inclined to pay and play. Now that truly was a proper coffee-house!

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The elderly gentleman with the elderly wig introduced himself as James Orchard Halliwell, a long-time resident of Cambridge who had been introduced to the delights of John Delaport's coffee house alongside Emmanuel College some sixty years earlier.

But it was not the coffee that had attracted him: it was the garden and the ladies who made their way there. Not that these were the same ladies who could be found just across the road in the notorious Spinning House. Business had boomed and soon John had been obliged to put in restrictions. Having been at a considerable expense to make his garden pleasant and agreeable he found that people were just taking the opportunity to promenade round it. So he started issuing tickets at the gate which could be redeemed for either coffee, tea, chocolate,

jellies, syllabubs, tarts, or cakes. He also provided a gardener to gather the fruit, peas or beans grown there which would be served fresh to those who dined or supped at the establishment, with wine, punch or ale ordered from whichever tavern the diners should wish. And on Monday evenings – weather permitting – there was both vocal and instrumental music.

Nor did Delaport neglect his principal trade of wig-maker. He opened premises opposite the Senate House supplying perukes of every denomination from the most graceful full bottom tyes down to stuft bruth, cut or light scratch at near one third less than their usual prices. Such wigs had gone out of fashion 30 years before and Pickwick had to dig deep into his memory to recall just which was which. But John had been quick to cash in on any remaining trade by supplying any bespoke wig at just twelve hours notice. And those preferring wear their own hair could have it cut and dressed in the latest styles. Despite his efforts it was not enough and soon he gave up that side of his trade.

But he started another with a gout and physic garden selling Doctor Jannsen's famous Anti-Scorbutic diet drink - a certain cure for pimpled or blotched faces and a sure preventive against the gout and rheumatism. Then there was his never failing electuary for curing the piles, something several of his clients could testify to. Amongst the other lotions and potions he retailed a book entitled *The Anti Gonorrhoea* calculated for gradually extirpating the syphilitic or venereal contagion. Perhaps the proximity to the Spinning House might have had some significance after all and the 'French lessons' he'd promoted may have had taught more than language

And if illness prevented you travelling to him, then John would come to you, attending any gouty person within a day's journey of Cambridge to take away your pains in a few hours with the promise of 'No Cure No Pay'.

However his own health was failing; when returning from a journey he was struck with a fit of the palsy which took away the use of his left hand and foot. In endeavouring to get off his horse he fell on his side and could not get up or walk. His face was distorted and his mouth so drawn aside that he could scarcely speak. He took such remedies as were prescribed and used the hot bath but with very little benefit and everybody thought he would never recover the use of his limbs.

But John was not one to give up, nor miss the opportunity of encouraging the sale of patent remedies. Having heard of the great cures that had been effected by Velno's Syrup he administered himself a potion. Soon he was able to report how notwithstanding his age and the extreme inclemency of the season he daily grew better and could now use his hand and foot as well as ever. But the syrup brought only temporary relief for he died just before Christmas in 1772. Since then the glory-days of coffee houses had been forgotten – but not by Orchard Halliwell. He had plans to ensure the memory of the happy days he's spent in such establishments would never fade – why he had a manuscript with him that Pickwick might care to peruse.

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In Orchard Halliwell's early days coffee-houses had been far more than just places to drink coffee; they had been centres when young and old had indulged in witty conversation – in fact this had been a tradition in Cambridge even since the 1600s. Now he had been delving into the dusty recesses of his memory and the University library to compile a little booklet on the jokes that had been shared there in years gone past. Not that many of them had been funny in those days, and time had not made them any more amusing. There was the contemporary story about Thomas Hobson, the famous carrier, who had got to chatting with an attractive young lady who'd booked a passage to London in his cart. He'd asked what she was intending to do down there and the answer came back: she was to seek for a position in service. And

what was her name, he'd enquired. "Joan", came the reply. "Oh dear Joan, you'll never get a place in London with such a coarse name. Your name must be Precilla, that's a fine name", he'd told her. So the maid that boarded his cart left it transformed and started a new life with a new identity.

But country girls had little concept about life in the town anyway. A village wench travelling the six miles to Cambridge market, passed by King's College Chapel when the organ was playing. Hearing the music she went in and seeing a seat empty, and being weary, sat down in it. It chanced to be the seat of the provost of the college who was on his way to the chapel for a service. So a college official took her by the hand to pull her out, to which she replied: "I pray sir, let me alone to sit still, for indeed I am so weary now, I cannot dance" – and Orchard chuckled as he related it. Women were an obvious topic of male humour – two women, scolding each other, one said "Thou liest like a thief and a witch". The other replied, "But thou liest like an almanac-maker; for thou liest every day and all the year long". Two bedmakers, chancing to fall out in one of the college chambers, the one of them struck the other with a fire-shovel desperately wounding her. Being blamed by a scholar for striking her with such a weapon she replied "Why, what fittinger weapon than the fire-shovel, for she is such a nasty jade as is not fit to be touched with a pair of tongs!"

It was not tongs but bellows that featured in another of the favourite tales. A scholar of Trinity College had a room near another man's that was reputed to be a great scholar and had many books, some so rare as not to be had elsewhere. Going to this great scholar's chamber he desired him to let him see such a book, which he did. And the book being in his hands, he further desired to borrow it for some short time, that he might read it in his own room. The other told him he did not lend out his books but if he desired to read it, or peruse it in his chamber at any time, it was at his service. Not long after, the weather being very cold, the scholar with the large library wanted to have a good fire but lacked a pair of bellows. Knowing the other student had a good pair the great book-man sent to him, to pray him to lend him his bellows. "I will with all my heart", said the other. But when he came down to borrow them he was told, "Truly I do not use to part with my bellows out of my chamber, especially in such cold weather. But if you please to come to my chamber you shall have the use of my bellows here, as much as you please, and when you will". Oh how, they had chortled at such wit.

And why was learning always called a republic: because scholars are so poor they do not have a sovereign amongst them! An undergraduate, seeing his friends, tearing up some letters said: "Pray, give me one for I want to sent it to my friends, for they have not heard from me for a long while". A gentleman living in Barnwell wrote to a friend in London: "If you be well 'tis well, keep you well; so farewell, from Barnwell"

But there were profound matters to exercise the mind as well. Which is the more useful body: the sun or the moon? Why the moon: for it affords us light in night time, when we really want it, whereas the sun is with us only in the day time, when we can see

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Seated in the Little Rose coffee house Halliwell now recalled some of the tales that had amused the undergraduates and dons of the past that based their wit on the supposed activities of Cambridge folk. "A townsman going to sleep put a brass pot under his head; and, because he found it too hard, he stuffed it full with feathers and chaff. 'Now I shall sleep easy', said he". "A Cambridge lawyer sending for a tailor to make him a suit of clothes, told him he must make him a very strong suit that would wear well. The tailor replied he would make a chancery suit – which was sure to last a very long time".

By now the jokes were wearing as thin as the old man's wig and Elliott Smith decided to interrupt the flow. 'Speaking of tailors, did you hear of the gentleman of St John's College who was very fond of two things; one was clothes, the other electrical experiments. Indeed he spent so much on the latter that he had no money to pay his tailor's bills. Time after time the fellow clumped up the stairs to his rooms, rapped on the doors and went away again. So the student decided to do something about it. He charged his electrical machine more than ordinarily and fixed the conductor to the latch of the door. Then he waited for his creditor to come visiting once more. 'Come in', he called and as the tailor grasped the knob subjected the poor man to an electric shock that sent him reeling backwards, more dead that alive. It was the last time he tried to collect that particular debt.

Halliwell countered with an older tale: Mr. Anthony Sleep, of Trinity College, being offered a small living in the country (of little better value than his fellowship) if he would leave the college, sent for his horse and resolved to go to see it. But just as he was leaving he met the county sheriff coming the other way, his trumpeters announcing his presence. At that Sleep turned his horse and retraced his footsteps. His friends wondered at his quick return, and asked him the reason. 'Why, in faith,' says he, 'as I was going out of town I heard a voice in the air cry, Tarry-tony - tarry-tony - tarry-tony ;' and away came I to my good fellowship again.

It was back to Smith: Another fellow of Trinity College, as deaf as a post, decided to visit a friend living near Bury St Edmunds. Chancing to meet an acquaintance at Newmarket he was persuaded to tarry there awhile, put up his nag at the Ram and decided to sample the hospitality provided. The wine proved particularly palatable, if somewhat more potent that that he was used to at Top Table. As a result he was somewhat befuddled when he recommenced his journey and soon found himself off his intended route. He came across a signpost which had been turned by little wanton boys and now pointed across open fields, not down roads. Just then he espied an old farmer in a jog-trot pace, making towards him. 'Hallo! my good man, can you tell me the way to my friends at Higham, for I am quite at fault?' 'Lack-a-daisy, sir,' the rustic replied, 'you're mortally out o' your way; whoy, if it be that you want to go to there, you must go down hin hinder lane, and then turn round to the left over yin yinder common, then you'll see a hol and a pightal, and the old mills, and master's noine acre-piece o'whate; then keep along the right, and then the left, and down our home medders, and then up the …'

'Stay, stay, my good friend I' exclaimed the don in the midst of the farmer's harangue. 'You see I am unfortunately deaf', and he began to pull out his faithful ear trumpet. But the farmer no sooner espied the shining end of it, than, setting spurs to his steed, he galloped off with the swiftness of the wind: for the clod mistook it for a blunderbuss, and him for a highwayman. Away went clod, and away went the don after him, bawling out for the fellow to stop, and the fellow roaring out for mercy, not daring to look behind him. Thus they proceeded three or four miles, the muzzle of the don's horse close upon the rump of the farmer's, till at length coming to the Earl of Bristol's park, the farmer, espying a breach in the paling, rode through in a twinkle and got clear off. Fortunately there was a cottage not far off whose inmates put the don on the right road – but by now he was still twelve miles away from where he was meant to be.

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Orchard Haliwell had been collecting jokes of the Cambridge coffee houses for many years; now he was wanting to get them published and for him there was only one printer – the University Press. But this was truly ludicrous for they mainly printed bibles, testaments and prayer books and that had been the subject of considerable battle with the Stationers' Company. Indeed if the Londoners had not been so lack in their proof reading – on one

occasion omitting the word ‘not’ from the commandment about committing adultery - then the Cambridge press would have ceased to exist at all.

But instead they had made considerable progress. In recent years one of their printers, John Baskerville, had come up with a new form of type, better suited to the fading eyesight of older clerics and within the last year or so they’d even managed to incorporate colour, adding a red border to the pages of bibles.

But the biggest boost had come with the establishment of the British and Foreign Bible Society, dedicated to distributing bibles throughout the empire and beyond. The Society were committed to producing as many at as cheap a price as possible. As the Cambridge press was one of the only three authorised to print them their production had trebled within the last eight years, now approaching over 150,000 copies annually.

It made the University a tidy profit, but there were problems. It took a great deal of time to set up a Bible, especially when there were footnotes and variant forms of type to contend with. Some people argued that it would be better to then store the completed pages of print so that another impression could be produced when next required. But there was nowhere big enough to put them, anyway type was more expensive than wages and there was never enough. Time after time a compositor would find himself short of a letter and have to send a boy rummaging to try and locate one.

In addition to the usual founts there were Alexandrian Greek, Hebrew, Syriac, Arabic, Greek and Latin, not to mention Saxon letters. Then when the time came to print examination papers there would be all the mathematical symbols – it was not unusual for a dagger to be set sideways to form a plus sign - and with the current developments in scientific research who knows what the future might hold.

A few years ago the University had bought the commercial rights a new form of printing called stereotyping invented by Earl Stanhope. Now a mould could be taken from the surface of a whole page of composed type and this cast used to make plates which could be used time and again. Only it now seemed that the moulds were breaking up before many copies had been run off. To use it they had to invest in new printing presses - also developed by Stanhope. Now there was talk steam presses being introduced in addition to the 30 Columbian machines currently in use. Doubtless this would be seen as a way of reducing some of the existing employees – about 150 people currently worked in the various departments

Halliwell knew something of the process; he had been apprenticed as a printer in his distant youth, graduating from the apprentices’ to one of the other two ships – Denton’s and Sutton’s. Indeed it had been here in the Little Rose that he had celebrated his coming out of time – though in something stronger than coffee. He’d started by printing a four-nick Minion double-column prayer book and worked his way up, ensuring he kept on the right side of the clicker, who allocated the work.

It was a skilled job setting up a book; the reading boy would dictate it word by word, comma by comma, paragraph by paragraph while the compositor skilfully set up each line, spacing it, justifying it until all was complete. Then the proof would be struck to be checked and sent to the author – many of whom would rewrite complete paragraphs, meaning that the whole job needed to be done all over again. Why could not authors ensure that their manuscripts were accurate first time, asked Halliwell, something that Pickwick realised that he had been guilty of – not that his writings would ever be accorded such a prestigious imprint.

But it might be possible for even Pickwick's prose to carry a Cambridge imprint, as Orchard Halliwell explained. The University Press was committed to publishing the intellectual outpourings of their own dons – should indeed there be any! But it would also print other material, competing with other presses in an effort to make ends meet.

They needed the income, having undertaken one or two prestigious productions that had turned out disastrously. One had been a two-volume facsimile of a fifth-century manuscript that had been given to the University in 1581. It was published in 1793 and still in print fifty years later and likely to remain so.

Then there was a work by Suidas, an ancient Greek who lived at Constaninople in the tenth-century. He'd compiled a Lexicon, full of material on philology, grammar and literary history that everybody was sure would be a best-seller if it was reissued. So the University came to an arrangement with an Oxford stationer who agreed to purchase 1,500 copies to sell at £1.10.6 a volume. Only he was not a successful seller and was thrown into gaol after he ran up masses of bad debts.

So the Syndics had to search round for another partner. They came up with a Dutchman, but he considered the price too high. In this he was accurate; 25 years after publication the stock was still unsold, half of the pages were in the University warehouse and half with a London stockist, Mr Innys. But neither had a complete set.

So the University set up another Syndicate to decide what to do and they suggested that each could buy sheets from the other at a halfpenny a piece. Only negotiations became stalled and eventually the University bought the whole of Innys' stock for £400. They now had 410 complete copies of the work but found nobody wanted them. Yet another Syndicate was set up and, about 50 years after publication, sold 75 copies to Thomas Merrill, a Cambridge bookseller at a very cheap price. They ended up giving the others away or swapping them for other books that were marginally more useful. But at least they got rid of them. Then as soon as they went out of print what happened – the Oxford University Press brought out another edition in 1834!

But one Cambridge University printer was sure he'd hit on a best-seller. When Joseph Bentham was appointed to the job he commissioned his brother James to compile a massive history of Ely Cathedral. He started writing in 1756 and it began printing in 1764 – which is just as well as Joseph was replaced two years later. Fortunately the new printer honoured the commitment, though the book wasn't finally delivered to the subscribers until 1771. Whether anybody else will buy them is a moot point: James did try to give one away to the Prince of Wales during one of his regular visits to Highflyer Hall at Ely. To make it more attractive he obtained a complete set of portraits of all the Kings of England from Egbert to James II (including Oliver Cromwell!). He bound them up with his cathedral history and waited his opportunity. But on the due day George dined somewhat too well and was not equal to the task of receiving the book, so Bentham kept it.

There's another problem facing the printing trade – a shortage of paper. With more and more bibles being needed, there's more and more demand for paper, putting pressure on the paper mills who are using inferior materials, giving poorer quality paper. The Press switched their suppliers to Longman and Dickinson from Rickmansworth, but still they need masses of the stuff and now use Towgoods from Dartford as well. It's an expensive business, transporting paper to Cambridge, especially as we used to have our own papermills at Barnwell back in the 1600s. Now the only reminder of it is the Papermills turnpike gate that used to be kept by Mrs Page and her daughters – brave ladies. You'll have heard the tale? No, but he was obviously going to

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The Papermills turnpike gate on the road to Newmarket is kept by Mrs Page and her daughters, Orchard Halliwell explained. One evening she noticed two or three suspicious characters lurking about, and as they did not withdraw as night fell she mentioned her uneasiness to two gentlemen who passed the gate on their way to Bottisham. They made light of the matter, saying the men no doubt were anxious to keep near shelter from the impending storm. But partly to allay her fears, partly because of the weather, and partly because of the beauty of her daughters, the travellers waited till the storm had subsided before they departed on their way.

All remained quiet and the ladies retired to bed until the mail cart passed as usual between one and two o'clock in the morning, when Mrs Page had to get up, through on a cape over her night-clothes and see it through the turnpike. No sooner had she got settled down again when they was a lusty cry of “gate” was heard, and she started out to open it. But her daughter remarked that she’d heard no sound of horses and advised her to be careful. So Mrs Page waited until her elder girl had armed herself with a loaded pistol, and then carefully unlocked the door, which opens inwards with a hutch door opening the reverse way. No sooner was that inner door open than a tall man thrust a stick in and aimed a blow at her head. Fortunately she jerked back and the blow fell on her breast, hurting her but slightly.

Well she slammed the door to but the ruffian had got his stick through the gap and tried to force his way in. A scuffle ensued during which Miss Page dropped her pistol but motioned to her sister to give her a second, which was lying on the table. Then taking aim in the direction in which the assailant was standing, she fired. She heard an exclamation of " Oh ! " as though the man was hit, and immediately the sounds of retreating footsteps of two or three persons. Miss Page then opened the door and fired the second pistol. There seems little doubt that the man was hit, though it is not probable he was dangerously hurt, as the pistol was a small one, and loaded with small shot. But everybody is full of admiration for her courage and the number of young gentlemen journeyed out to the turnpike gate just for the chance of a glimpse of the young lady.

It was the talk of every tavern, especially those in Silver Street, when printers gathered to slake their thirst after a long day’s work. In fact so much of the money earned at the University Press was spent there that it seems quite appropriate that several of the former inns had now been incorporated into the new Pitt Press.

When Orchard first started, printing was carried on in an old house on the corner of Silver Street and Queens’ Lane with a range of warehouses stretching behind the almshouses. It was inconvenient and there had been plans to incorporate a new printing house when the new Senate House was first talked about, but nothing happened. Instead the Syndics bought the White Lion pub on the south side of Silver Street and altered it into a printing office with a stereotype foundry next door. But this was soon too small and the other buildings became so dilapidated that something had to be done urgently. They looked around for more space and bought the old Cardinal’s Cap belonging to James Nutter which stretched from Trumpington Street to the yard of the old Black Lion, opposite Queens’ Lane.

It was one thing to have the land – now they had to find the money to build on it. But, remarkably this was not a problem. William Pitt, the young Prime Minister who’d led the country during the early conflict with Napoleon, had been an undergraduate at Pembroke College and been Member of Parliament for the University. After he died in 1806 numerous memorials were erected to his memory, including a statue in the University Senate House and another in Hanover Square, London. But the London Pitt Club had collected more money than they needed and were wondering how to spend what was left over.

Orchard Halliwell related how one of the committee of the London Pitt Club was the Bishop of Gloucester and Bristol, James Henry Monk, who had been Professor of Greek at Cambridge. He sowed the seeds of an idea that was taken up by the Marquis of Camden who talked it over with John Lamb, Master of Corpus Christi and Vice Chancellor of the University, and then put a proposal to the Pitt people who were debating what to do with money collected for a memorial to the former Prime Minister and University Member of Parliament. They agreed that the surplus funds could go towards a new printing house for the University of Cambridge providing it was erected opposite Pembroke College – which was just the site that had already been bought. Needless to say the University jumped at the suggestion and readily agreed to call it the Pitt Press in his honour.

Was it just coincidence, Pickwick pondered, that this same Marquis Camden had shortly afterwards been appointed as Chancellor of the University of Cambridge and installed with all the celebrations about which he had been informed by Romilly?

But things did not move speedily. It was another four years before the London committee got around to inviting architects to come up with designs. They selected one by Edward Blore who, as he was coming up to Cambridge, took the opportunity to confer as to what the press actually required in this new building. Not that it was too important a consideration: this was to be a memorial to Pitt and that was the overriding thing. There would need to be a handsome room approached by an impressive staircase, anything else was incidental. By this time the University had been buying up as much of the area between Silver Street and Mill Lane as they could, and Blore drew up plans for this site. Once these had been finalised the University finally acquired the remaining houses and asked the architect to change his designs to make full use of it. This took time as Blore had other things to occupy him with commissions for alterations at Trinity College chapel as well as work on Buckingham House in London, Government House in Sydney Australia and Hinchingbrooke House, Huntingdon after it was severely damage by a great fire.

Inevitably there were snags. For a start the larger scheme cost more than the Pitt Committee had offered, then they found that the Hanover Square statue was going to be more expensive than they'd anticipated and the University had to fund the difference.

Eventually the first stone of the new façade facing Trumpington Street was laid by the Marquis of Camden in October 1831 and building started. The original designs were amended as work progressed but in April 1833 came the formal opening when undergraduates joined university dignitaries for the occasion. Camden gave a speech in a fine loud voice, but ran out of things to say and his address tailed off. The response by the Vice Chancellor, praising Billy Pitt was somewhat turgid and uninteresting but at least there was a cold collation to be enjoyed in the upstairs Pitt room once a souvenir copy of the inscription on the foundation stone had been printed off on a fine printing-press.

Behind the front building there's a rabbit warren of yards and stairs, more like the printer's quarter in a mediaeval town than a modern printing press. The noise of the machines thumping away day and sometimes night has quite disturbed the tranquillity of this part of the town – but that's progress. At least from the compositors' point of view things are greatly improved. In the old works the newly-printed pages had to be hung up to dry over their heads with the drip of ink becoming something of an occupational hazard, while sometimes a draught would dislodge them, sending them falling down on the workers beneath or catching light on the candles by which the men worked. The only problem since then has been just what to do with all the extra space. The ground floor is used for storage and other rooms

provide homes for Prof Whewell's mineralogical specimens and some of the Earl Fitzwilliam's paintings that will go into the new Museum whenever that is finished.

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From his seat at the Little Rose coffee house Pickwick had a fine view of yet more building activity – this time the new Fitzwilliam Museum that was finally being constructed to provide a home to the bequest of Richard, Viscount Fitzwilliam. But in many Cambridge eyes that name was more famous for prize-fighting than fine art.

When the Honourable George Fitzwilliam had been up at Trinity he'd in joined the usual undergraduate practice of attending village sports for miles around where they deliberately set about to annoy the local youths by paying unwanted attention to the village girls. The result was inevitably a challenge, gown versus yokel.

There was one such celebrated occasion at Melbourn feast when the obviously well-bred young gentlemen acted as obnoxiously as they traditionally did and waited the battle that would follow. Except two of their number seemed to know less Latin and Greek than the rest. One rejoiced in the name of "Soapy Dan" and the other was a big black man named Mahone. They were both professional pugilists who had been recruited by the university party after they'd seen them perform in a bare-knuckle contest. Now as University champions they played terrible havoc amongst the Melbourn lads until John King stepped forward to restore village pride. He quickly floored "Soapy Dan", and then had a regular set-to with the great black man, whom, after a sharp fight, he vanquished also, to the amazement of the Honourable George and his cronies.

George had staked ten guineas on the issue, which he handed over to King, and taking a mighty fancy to him brought him to London. There, after a short training, the Melbourn Champion met Jack Power at the noted fighting rendezvous of Mousley Hurst, on an issue of £50 a side. The battle was a terrible one, and though King was the least skilful of the two, he fought for 47 rounds before giving in to his better-trained antagonist, and practically closed a fighting career which was as surprising as it was brief.

From Royalty, down to the smallest stable or errand boy in the land, prize-fighting was 'the noble art of self-defence' and looked up to as a manly and worthy spectacle. Even the Prince Regent, afterwards George IV, did not think it beneath his royal dignity to pet and encourage professional 'bruisers'. He attended the prize-ring, shook hands with Torn Cribb, the champion, and drove through the streets with a celebrated boxer in his carriage.

And few places offered better facilities than the neighbourhood of Royston, especially Noon's Folly, near the borders of Hertfordshire, Cambridgeshire and Essex. Here it was easy to cross over from one county to another just in case a magistrate or constable tried to interfere with the events. In fact such gentlemen were usually present, but as spectators rather than spoil-sports, Orchard Halliwell explained.

One of the most memorable battles in the prize-ring that he'd witnessed was a contest for the championship held on the 2nd January,1827. Jem Ward, the champion, made his headquarters at the Red Lion, Royston while the challenger, Peter Crawley, and his friends stopped at a roadhouse about two miles outside the town.

The event was the occasion of tremendous excitement, thousands of visitors attended, coaches were loaded and overloaded and villages for miles around were nearly emptied. That morning Royston High Street was so full of people that you could walk on their heads. The problem was that nobody knew where quite the contest was to be held. In fact great precautions had been taken and two rings erected. One of them was put up on the Heath and the other near

Heydon Grange. When rumours of the latter spread away went an excited avalanche of human beings, running helter-skelter over fields and hedges only to find themselves disappointed, and had to jog back as fast as tired legs and panting lungs would carry them! One spectator lost his life by the excessive exertion and overheating but that was considered a small price to pay for a good day's sport.

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Pickwick listened with growing horror as Orchard Halliwell reported the battle that had taken place in a boxing ring set up at the lower end of the cricket ground at Royston in 1827. About ten to fifteen thousand persons had assembled, embracing all classes of society from post-boy to nobleman. The fight came off about mid-day amidst the utmost excitement and enthusiasm. Jem Ward was allowed to be the finest fighter in England, the rapidity of his movements gave amazing advantage for the display of his inimitably fine science, connoisseurs claimed. He'd displayed the champion's belt that was to be competed for by Peter Crawley, a giant of a man, standing six feet two inches, while Ward was just five feet nine inches.

The boxing was a furious with both inflicting such a tremendous onslaught upon each other that within the space of twenty-six minutes, and after eleven rounds, both men were perfectly exhausted, and in a wretched plight. Crawley had his cheek laid open and both eyes nearly closed, while Ward could hardly stand. In this short space of time the two pugilists had reduced themselves to the pitiable condition of simply mauling and hugging each other. Finally Crawley managed to push Ward down; he could not rally in time so the champion lost his crown

But more notorious than both was a pugilist called Owen Swift who'd been involved in three fatal fights. In 1837 he'd fought near Noon's Folly on the Newmarket Road at Barkway. This time there'd been no attempt to disguise the object of the gathering as the contest took place so near the turnpike road that the stage coaches paused as they passed to allow the drivers and their passengers to witness the spectacle. On that occasion the battle had lasted for 105 rounds, taking more than two hours and Swift had been victorious.

Then a few weeks ago, in March 1838, he'd been back, this time pitted against William Phelps, otherwise known as "Brighton Bill", a young man of only twenty years of age. Bets were offered and taken that both men would die in consequence of the injuries. This time the contest was somewhat quicker, lasting mere 70 rounds in ninety minutes – not that the three thousand spectators were too disappointed. They included John Parr, the high constable for the parish of Barkway, there not to see fair play, but just to view the fun, although such contests were illegal.

Parr watched as the unfortunate young man from Brighton was pummelled to a pulp. He watched Phelps carried from the ring, put into a carriage and taken to his lodgings at the Wheatsheaf Inn. He visited him next day when he could not speak, and appeared insensible. Saw him again on Thursday and Friday, when he found him dying, and he expired ten minutes after he'd entered the room.

His opponent, Owen Swift, fled the country as soon as he learned of the fatal result. His London friends employed four fellows to try to recover the body and prevent an inquest with a reward of £500 offered if they succeeded! They failed. Now there was no hope of hushing things up. A jury returned a verdict of manslaughter against Swift and his seconds.

Brighton Bill was buried in the lower corner of Barkway churchyard, recorded in the parish register, as William Phelps, of Brighton, Sussex, aged twenty years. But one vicar's wife had a special reason to remember him. She'd been on the King's Lynn coach when it had stopped

to pick up three passengers. Two coarse-looking fellows in rough great coats got on the outside while a well dressed young man took his seat inside. Bedecked in an elegant suit of black, and displaying on a delicate white hand a diamond ring, they'd had enjoyed an extremely interesting conversation. She'd taken him for a gentleman of distinction at the University. But this was the man soon to be battered to his death in the Royston ring. It was hard to tell who was who in the fighting game.

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The post-mortem report on the battered Barkway boxer had clearly implicated not only the surviving bruiser but also the seconds who had attended both combatants. They were known to be "Dutch Sam", otherwise Samuel Evans, Francis Redmond, Richard Curtis, and "Brown, the go-cart-man". Already rumours were circulating that at least one of them, Redmond, had been to a barber to have his distinctive beard totally reshaped in the hope of avoiding identification.

But "Dutch Sam" was too well-known to the police; he had already appeared in court in London charged with assaulting a constable. He had been drinking at the "Waterford Arms" tavern in the Haymarket in the company of the man whose name appeared on the inn sign and Lord Waldegrave another of his aristocratic pals, when the policeman entered. Their Lordships soon started to chaff the upholder of the law until Sam had piped up "What gentleman would like to see a policeman put on his back?" This suggestion was received with great glee and soon Constable Mackenzie had been floored, breaking his collar bone and one of his arms as he fell. At the trial that followed Lord Waldegrave had been fined and Sam bailed to appear at the next Westminster Sessions. It was whilst awaiting that trial that he had acted as second to Owen Swift. Now, like him, Sam had disappeared abroad.

But what of the other aristocrat in the bar-room brawl? Henry de la Poer Beresford, , the 27-year-old Marquis of Waterford, was notorious. He had succeeded to his title while at Eton after both parents and his elder brother had died and later returned to his old school to steal the headmaster's whipping block! He'd matriculated at Christ Church, Oxford in 1829, but soon been invited to leave, and now was to be found most frequently at the racetrack, on the hunting-field, or in the police courts. His favoured companions were young 'sporting men', prize-fighters, and prostitutes.

"The Mad Marquis" was powerfully built and had an uncontrolled sense of humour. He delighted in challenging passers-by to a fight, breaking windows or literally upsetting apple carts. He also took part in duels, painted the heels of a parson's horse with aniseed and hunted with bloodhounds. Such activities had frequently landed him in court when he laughed at the derisory fines imposed on one as rich as he was. There was one exploit in particular when the Marquis and a group of friends had run riot round Melton Mowbray daubing the toll-bar and several buildings with paint, literally painting the town red. The escapade had been commemorated in a rhyme:

> Coming it strong with a Spree and a spread,
> Milling the day-lights, or cracking the head;
> Go it ye cripples! come tip us your mauleys,
> Up with the lanterns, and down with the Charleys:
>
> If lagg'd we should get, we can gammon the Beak,
> Tip the slavies a Billy to stifle their squeak.
> Come the bounce with the snobs, and a **** for their betters,
> And prove all the Statutes so many dead letters.

Pickwick's companions looked puzzled but *milling* was slang for fighting, *tip us your mauleys* was to shake hands and a Charley was a night watchman. L*agged* was to be

caught, *gammon* was patter and a *beak* is a magistrate. *Tip the slavies a Billy to stifle their squeak* meant to bribe the servants with a sovereign to keep them from informing. *Come the bounce with the snobs* was to bully anybody of low rank and nobody needed to explain what they thought of any who considered themselves superior to the young aristocratic tearaways. But was there another, darker side to the young Lord's activities?

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The mad Marquis, the notoriously rich Lord Waterford, was – some said – the notorious 'Spring-heeled Jack' who'd been attacking London women. It was about a year ago – in September 1837 – that girls on Barnes Common in southwest London first reported a man in a dark cloak vaulting the railings of a churchyard, tearing their clothes, and running off laughing loudly. It had been followed by similar assaults on Clapham Common in one of which the attacker left footprints which look as if there were 'machines or springs' on his shoes.

Then a barmaid attending Blackheath Fair claimed to have been molested twice. Once at the fair itself where a man with prominent eyes and a ringing laugh who 'looked like a nobleman' pulled her shawl off. Then on her way home a huge figure had leapt out at her from a clump of trees, bounding in great strides, and began ripping her clothes with what felt like iron claws. She'd had time to note that it had fiery eyes, spat blue flames, and smelt of sulphur, but its laugh was that of the man at the fair - then she fainted.

By mid-October similar reports had come from East Sheen, Richmond, Ham, Kingston, Hampton, Teddington, Twickenham, Hounslow, Uxbridge, Camberwell, and Tooting Common. They consistently described a tall athletic figure in a long cloak and high-heeled boots, with fiery eyes, fingers as hard as claws, and - sometimes - pointed ears. Women's clothes were torn, but they were never raped or wounded.

Then in January 1838 the Lord Mayor of London received a letter from an anonymous 'Resident of Peckham' who said that some individuals of the highest ranks of life had laid a wager with a mischievous and foolhardy companion, that he durst not take upon himself the task of visiting many of the villages near London in three different disguises. He was to appear as a ghost, a bear, and a devil. Then he was to enter a gentleman's gardens and alarm the inmates of the house.

Tales circulated of how at one mansion the man had rang the bell, and on the servant coming to open door, she'd glimpsed the dreadful figure of a spectre. The poor girl had immediately swooned, and never from that moment been in her senses. Other servant girls about Kensington, Hammersmith and Ealing could tell similar tales. But strange to say the papers had been still silent on the subject. Doubtless they had the whole history at their finger ends, but had been induced to remain quiet, people speculated

Then The Times had reported the story and other papers had followed suit. The Lord Mayor was inundated by letters from various places in and around London complaining of similar wicked pranks. It seemed several young women in Hammersmith had been frightened into dangerous fits and some 'severely wounded by a sort of claws the miscreant wore on his hands'. In Stockwell, Brixton, Camberwell and Vauxhall several people had died of fright, and the trickster had been repeatedly seen in Lewisham and Blackheath, where the police were too frightened of him to act. One correspondent from St. John's Wood claimed the monster had been seen 'clad in mail and as a bear', and repeated the story of the wager among young upper-class men. Only now the bet was that the monster should kill six women in some given time.

The Lord Mayor formed a vigilante committee of magistrates and army officers to track down the villain; police patrols were set up; rewards were offered; even the elderly Duke of Wellington himself joined a posse. But nobody was caught, and panic continued to spread about "Spring-Heeled Jack".

Then in February, Jane Alsop had opened the door of her father's house in Bow to a man claming to be a police officer, who asked her to bring a light because he had "caught Spring-Heeled Jack in the lane. But this man then attacked her, tearing at her dress and hair until other members of her family ran to help. She told magistrates: "He was wearing a kind of helmet, and a tight-fitting white costume like an oilskin. His face was hideous, his eyes were like balls of fire. His hands had great claws, and he vomited blue and white flames."

It was all too easy to ascribe such activities to Henry, Marquis of Waterford, and Cambridge servants should be on their guard. For his carriage had been spotted at Barkway when 'Brighton Bill' had been battered to death. And other local noblemen were known to be addicted to fighting.

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One of the aristocrats of the noble art of prize fighting lived in his mansion a few miles from Royston, Orchard Halliwell continued. Sir Peter Soame - whose father, also Sir Peter Soame, had been a gentleman of the Privy Chamber in the Royal household of George III in 1798 - was the chief promoter of encounters in the prize-ring in this district.

His residence at Heydon was the scene of many a roistering gathering of the sporting fraternity, and the baronet was such a practised hand himself, that in the event of the fighting men not turning up according to appointment he would himself step into the ring and challenge anyone present, rather than allow the spectators to go away disappointed.

On one occasion a local butcher, named Mumford, who had the reputation of 'the fighting butcher', went to Sir Peter's house, just as he had some guests to dinner, to demand payment of a small sum of money. The sporting baronet was equal to the occasion; asking his guests to excuse him a few minutes, he went down into the kitchen, saw the butcher, and asked him if he was not the 'fighting butcher'. The applicant acknowledged that they did call him by that name. "Well then," replied the baronet "that is the amount you say I owe you, and we will see who is to have it". At this he laid the money on the table, to be handed over to whoever came out on top.

The terms were agreed to, sawdust was brought into the kitchen and the butcher and baronet stripped and set to, with one or two of the servants to see fair-play. The fight was furious at the outset, but the butcher was soon defeated by the superior science of the baronet, and he had to depart without his money. Sir Peter calmly redressed and rejoined his guests in the dining room, as if nothing had occurred!

There were two young men who were lucky to be alive, given Sir Peter's fighting prowess. A few years back Sir Peter had been in London when he reached in his pocket for his silk handkerchief, only to find it gone. Three months later he'd appeared at the Old Bailey to give evidence. Not that he knew much about what had happened. But a truss maker, Thomas Lewis had seen it all.

He'd testified, "I was in Ludgate-street; and saw Sir Peter Soame go into a shoemaker's shop directly opposite to my house. Two men were close at his the heels and after he went into the shop, they loitered and seemed disposed to something. I kept my eye on them, and they separated and got one at each window, and they amused themselves for ten minutes or a quarter of an hour. At last one of them sat down at the private door, then got up and looked

into the shop to see if he was coming out. When he did they followed him and tried several times to pick his pocket before they got to St. Paul's Church-yard. Finally just as Sir Peter was going between the posts, one put his hand into his pocket and took his handkerchief out of it. When I came close to him I attempted to take hold of him by the collar, but he caught my eye, and ran behind the bar to go between the bar and the walls, and while he was running he threw the handkerchief from him. But another gentleman seized him so I turned myself round and took the other as his accomplice. When we acquainted Sir Peter with what had happened, he saw his handkerchief and owned it. So we took the villains to the Guildhall yard where I met with an officer, a constable, and he asked me what was the matter with these men? I told him they were pickpockets, and desired he would search them immediately. Of course he didn't have Sir Peter's handkerchief on him – he'd thrown it away. But he did have three or four others".

The men pleaded for mercy, one claimed he'd got a wife and family and worked very hard for his living. But it did no good: they were both sentenced to be transported for seven years. However if Sir Peter himself had got hold of them – well who can tell what the outcome would have been!

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One thing that was certain to rile Sir Peter Soame of Heydon, was any mention of his ancestry, remarked Elliot Smith with a wink. It was all a bit complicated.

Back in 1780 the previous Sir Peter had made his will. His had been in many ways a sad life. In 1729 he'd entered into a marriage settlement with Alethea, second daughter of Colonel Philips, Governor of Nova Scotia. Their first son, Peter, died in infancy in 1735, and another son likewise a year later. The third son, Henry, survived childhood and went to Eton but died in 1757. Before then Lady Alethea had died of heart failure, aged only 42. Sir Peter did not marry again and so had no heirs of his own – or so it seemed

However when the details of the will became known, gossip started. For his principal beneficiary was Anne, the illegitimate daughter of Paston Herne of Haviland Hall, Norfolk. She'd married Everard Buckworth who took her family name of Herne to please his father-in-law thus becoming known as Mr. Everard Buckworth Herne.

In his will Sir Peter had demanded that Anne's elder son, whose Christian name was Buckworth, should take the Soame family name. It was too good an offer to refuse, especially as Sir Peter also presented her younger son, John, to the living of Heydon in 1792 and left him lands at Berksdon in Hertfordshire on the same condition.

Now why, people speculated, should Sir Peter have made such arrangements unless of course there'd been a liaison between them of which Buckworth, the elder son, might be the fruit. If so he'd have then been a widower for 16 years and aged 53. Perfectly fine – except that she would have been only 20 years of age.

At any rate on Sir Peter's death in 1798 the estate was put in trust to provide an annuity for Mrs. Buckworth who soon moved into the manor-house. She did not live long to enjoy it, dying two years later. Then her elder son, Buckworth, successfully petitioned for the use of his benefactor's name thus becoming Mr. Buckworth Buckworth Herne Soame, and heir to the Heydon estate. He was 45 years of age and had accumulated a debt of over £1,000 that he could not discharge. Six years later, in 1812, he owed nearly £5,000 to W. Fletcher alone. The only way out was to let Fletcher take over the Heydon lands in exchange for the payment of an annuity of £300.

Two years later his luck changed. First, his father died, making him a baronet, and then his own eldest son, who he'd named Peter, reached the age of twenty-one. Now flush with money Buckworth regained his title to the estate from Fletcher and made it over to his son. When Buckworth died in 1822 his son succeeded him. To make things simpler Sir Peter John Everard Buckworth Herne Soame, was just called Sir Peter Soame or the fighting baronet.

Meanwhile Buckworth's younger brother John had continued as rector of Heydon, which was united with Little Chishill, another of the Soame advosons. Not that he often preached there, preferring to follow the example of other clerics and put in curates. He resigned the living in 1810 and he was in prison for debt within four years.

The new Sir Peter found the Soame family seat mortgaged to the hilt and in a state of decline. By 1813 the large Jacobean house with its two large bedchambers, a tapestry bedroom, dining parlour and two billiard rooms was in bad repair. He pulled it down and replaced it with a smaller residence that he called Heydonbury. He'd set about trying to balance the books by selling off bits of land here and there – something that Elliot Smith the auctioneer had been able to help with – and seemed to be successful, though gossips were suggesting that his debts were also rising. But that was certainly not something to be talked off in the hearing of the boxing baronet!

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Sir Peter Soame the boxing baronet from Heydon, was a dark, handsome man of great athletic power: it was said he could plant a dozen hurdles only a yard apart and clear them one at a time. As an equestrian he had few equals and was famous for the condition of his horses, which were the best turned out in the hunting fields.

Nor was Sir Peter behind in the fashion stakes: he made a notable figure in his skin-fit leather breeches, so tight that people wondered quite how he got into them at all. Orchard Halliwell had the answer: he would hang them in the damp cellars overnight to stretch them. Even then when he came to put them on it was not child's play, except that it was in some respects. For he would slide down the banisters into them, then mount his steed and head off to the hunt with his trousers still damp. To ward off any fear of a chill, Sir Peter was careful to keep his hip flask well filled and took other liquid refreshment whenever opportunity presented itself. He was quite a common sight beside the road from Cambridge recumbent on the grass verge. Many of the drivers of the fly wagons would be sure to look out for him, depositing the snoring lord in the parlour of the Black Horse at Fowlmere from which his servants would take him home.

He would often be seen on Royston Heath, enjoying the sports that were offered – delights such as badger-bating were popular with drinkers at the smaller public houses on the Market Hill. But the most popular was hare-coursing, though some like Warren Butler the Barkway poet would dispute the word 'sport' to describe what went on:

Here on this very spot, here have I seen
Such bloody deeds performed upon the ground;
And men have search'd the secret covers round,
Where ev'ry harmless rabbit could be found.

The innocent collection in a sack,
Are carelessly slung round their murd'rer's back
And one by one let loose with joy they fly;
This moment they are free - the next they die.

The savage hound set on amidst the fray,

Seizes and tears their little lives away.
While laughter from all sides his valour draws,
And even fair ones pat him with applause.

One pastime was more savage still: cockfighting with contests in which the Hertfordshire side of Royston brought its birds into the pit against those of the Cambridgeshire side. These were frequently fought at the Old Crown on the Monday and the Talbot Inns next day. Often the stakes took the form of a fat hog or a fat ox, though fights of fourteen cocks on each side for two guineas a battle were the norm. The Red Lion held cockings on the day of Odsey Races, when the racegoers finished up with fights at the inns in the town.

Newmarket was another centre: on one occasion a main of cocks was fought for 1,000 guineas a side, and 40 guineas for each battle, when there was a great deal of betting. One of the best-known characters in this activity was John Green who'd been born at in the town but moved to King's Lynn where he got a job as boots at the Duke's Head Hotel. However he soon got sacked and became the town's shoe black. He married to a local girl but soon became bored with here, so he sold her with a halter round her neck for a gallon of beer, then went back to his principal love – cock fighting.

Then in 1823 John Smith of Chatteris issued a challenge that he would fight a main of cocks, of three double days' play, against any gentleman in England. Each would bring 41 birds to the cockpit at Chatteris to fight for five guineas a battle and one hundred guineas the odd. John offered to make all the arrangements for sufficient pens and feeders for the birds and the town's hostelries could surely provide accommodation for their owners. There was the Black Horse, the George, Cross Keys and of course the one kept by James Cook – The Cock Inn. But Chatteris was not a place that Elliott Smith would recommend.

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Chatteris was a small town deep out in the fens that seemed unsure of its very name. Elliott Smith had seen it spelt on auction posters in a variety of ways: Chatriz, Chatrys, Catteris or Chatteras were often used. It mattered little to local people, but did cause problems for the post office.
Letters used to be received and sorted at St Ives but as the numbers increased they'd found it hard to get them ready in time for the arrival of the mail coach that carried them on to Wisbech, thus causing delays further along the road. So in 1807 Chatteris was made a post town in its own right. William Curtis had taken the job as postmaster but soon found that the paperwork involved was not worth the small salary offered – he was not prepared to sacrifice morning, noon and night to the work, especially as new regulations came out all the time. So he resigned.

William Brooks was employed in his place in 1812, adding the postal side to his grocer and draper's business. But he soon hit problems too. It was one thing to receive the letters, quite another to deliver them, especially at the rate the post office was prepared to pay for a letter carrier. They recommended payment of five shillings a week – but William couldn't find anybody willing to do it for less than nine! He just couldn't afford this amount out of his annual salary of £30 so he was forced to walk four miles up and down the street himself in all weathers.

Then people began to complain that their letters were being held up. Vigors Culea of Little Brook Street alleged that a letter to him received by Brooks on 27th September had not been delivered until 11th October, while a letter he'd sent to Mr Searle the baker took 14 days to arrive – and only then after he'd called in to complain. If this continued, he threatened to

complain to the Postmaster General in writing (provided the letter was ever delivered). Brooks considered this a scurrilous complaint and demanded that he been treated with civility.

Then William Kerr, a commercial traveller, claimed that a letter he'd handed in to be sent to a man in Blackfriars London had not reached its destination. Brooks remembered it – even the details of the address in Shoemaker Row - and was certain he'd placed it in the London bag; whatever had happened after that was not his fault. Thomas Fryer, who'd been High Sheriff for Cambridgeshire, was most upset to be told that he would not receive his letters until after eight o'clock in the morning – this was not good enough, he had to have them at least half-an-hour earlier. Brooks pointed out that during the winter months he was not obliged to start work until seven; the mail arrived at ten to six after which he returned to his bed until it was light enough to see what he was doing. He was not a well man but time after time people rapped on his door demanding a newspaper or letter. Fryer would just have to wait until the shop was open for business.

Worse scandal erupted when William Hurstwait claimed that two letters to him had been opened before he got them – the seal on one envelope had been broken. But the letter-carrier was adamant that as Hurstwait had been shaving when he delivered it that he'd left it with his servant. He'd not peaked inside. No – but Brooks had – that was the allegation. For Hurstwait was a draper and had gone down to London to buy goods, somebody was trying to find out what he'd paid for them. Who else could it have been except the postmaster – himself a draper?

This could not be hushed up. The Post Office sent down an investigator to look into the matter. After conducting a careful examination he was convinced there had been no tampering. The seal used to fasten the letter was only the size of a sixpenny piece and just not strong enough to stand the strain of being folded when carried in the delivery boys' jacket. But Hurstwait would never accept this. And similar allegations were being made at March.

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Elliott Smith the auctioneer recounted some interesting gossip about the post office at March that he'd gleaned from one of his many acquaintances, a chap named Evans.

Until a few years ago March had just been a small place and its post was overseen from Chatteris. People there were canny when it came to money and many residents collected their letters direct from the post office to save paying an extra penny to have them delivered; others would only pay a halfpenny for several letters.

Even so the letter carrier had to plod round the expanding town, walking between nine to twelve miles a day. Just as he got finished it was time for the Wisbech mail coach to drop off more letters on its return run to London. Although there were very few of them they still had to be taken out, so he had to turn around and go out again.

As the population and number of houses increased, the Post Office decided it would be better to pay the carrier a wage of thirteen guineas a year and discontinue the delivery charge. This might encourage more people to write letters, even though it cost a penny more to send a letter to London from March than it did from Chatteris because it was more than 80 miles from the capital.

Then came the accusations that Thomas Withnoe, the March postmaster, had been surcharging letters and not keeping the cash. That was not all: he'd employed an under-age letter carrier – his son - and persisted in taking 1d or ½ d for delivery of letters though this should be now be free. What's more he declined to send out newspapers by the letter carrier

until paid for delivery. Worse still it was said he'd also opened and read James Macann's letters to a young lady named Watson who he was sweet on. Thomas had been promptly dismissed.

But he denied any impropriety; his lad was only a little too young and he'd given strict instructions that the delivery charge was not to be made; if people had paid it they'd done so in appreciation of the excellence of the service. Nobody had told him that delivering the newspapers was part of his job. As for opening Macann's correspondence – why should he risk his livelihood when anyway it was no more than a love letter. The man had a grievance against him, having worked at the office and been sacked for bad behaviour. He'd also been questioned about the loss of a £10 note, and ever since had been spreading gossip and slander. The main problem was the Chatteris postmaster: they'd had disagreements, but not because of his mismanagement – it was the Chatteris man who'd made errors and overcharged letters.

Well the Postmaster General sent in an investigator who was convinced there had been frauds at March, but was uncertain if he could really prove who'd done it. Nevertheless they refused to reinstate Thomas.

The new man was John Smith a friend of the Chatteris postmaster – they were both dissenters; like him he was a draper and grocer whose house was on the route of mail coach so it was more convenient to drop off the post. Smith served for 11 years until 1832; then when the time came for him to retire he nominated Henry Pope as his successor.

The appointment still rested with the postmaster at Chatteris but by then March had grown to a population of over 5,700, whereas Chatteris was only 3,500, and it was the centre of a thriving navigation connecting Kings Lynn with Peterborough. The number of letters had increased so it was time that March became a post town with a London bag. Of course this would entail a rise in remuneration of £21, bringing the total salary up to £35. This was agreed but instead of Pope, William Johnson was appointed. However he did not enjoy the job very long; he died in January 1835 when his widow took over. Then on 7th February 1837 a mail bag was lost from the coach between March and Chatteris. That was not really surprising – for one thing the weather had been very bad and people were concerned about flooding – for another the Wisbech Coach was so inefficient that it paid tolls to cross a river that was not there!

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Pickwick had already heard the story of the drainage of the fens from John Peck, but now it appeared there was another side to it.

Early maps show two rivers running north to the Wash; one started in the rolling hills to the south of Cambridge. This was the infant Cam that Plumptre had explored before it ran through the town past Upware and Ely to Denver and Lynn, a route that Will Spread the bargee had explained in some detail.

The second was the bigger river, the Great Ouse, carrying water from Buckinghamshire and Bedfordshire until it flowed past Huntingdon and St Ives and on to Earith where it met the Adventurers' man-made rivers. But originally this water had run along the West Water, a natural watercourse, to Benwick and on to Chatteris, Doddington, Wimblington and March before finally finding the sea at Wisbech. That river had already silted up badly by 1604 when boatmen had found great difficulty trading down it. But once Cornelius Vermuyden had dug first his new Bedford River and then the even newer one alongside, it was a final nail in the disappearance of one of the fenland's great natural watercourses. It also marked a significant loss of revenue to the taker of the tolls at the ferry that carried road traffic across the old river just south of Chatteris.

Or at least it ought to have been. But no, tolls were still being charged on every conveyance that passed that point, each three-horse four-wheeled coach was forced to fork out ninepence, each four-horse a shilling, each ox a halfpenny and calf a farthing. Even locals had to pay to pass, although having paid once they could come and go as many times as they liked for the rest of the day.

But not so the mail coach. Normally they did not pay turnpike tolls, but this was a ferry – even though there was not water for it to cross. Mr Girldestone, the owner, demanded payment to let the Wisbech Mail Coach pass over a few yards of dry land which had long ago been river. The extraordinary claim was debated by Government Lawyers who agreed it had to be paid.

Not that this was the only impediment to the coach's journey to Wisbech; people still recalled how the stage had been stopped near Somersham by a masked footpad dressed in a brown coat. The chap had been medium height with a rough strong voice. Smith particularly remembered the details, for one thing there'd been a reward of £50 offered for his apprehension, but more seriously he himself used to travel through those inhospitable fens and was always on the alert for the danger of robbery.

Sometimes even the mail coach paused on its headlong journey when passengers caught glimpse of fenmen walking on water. Part of the Wisbech coach's route run along the bank of the Forty-foot River which in winter becomes an excellent place for skating. Back in 1823 Smith himself had witnessed one such competition. He'd been travelling to a sale when his ears caught a continuous deep thud, thud, thud. Then in the still air he detected the semblance of a tune and followed it. Soon he'd seen crowds of people, some in gigs, more on foot making their way to the road from Chatteris to Doddington. His horse had become restive as the crowds built up. Then there was another eerie sound, unlike anything he'd heard before, part swish, part scrape that gained in volume as did the music, though he could still not see where either was coming from.

Then at Carter's Bridge he'd glanced down to see the Chatteris Band playing from a lighter trapped in the ice which was already starting to crack under the weight of the boat and the onlookers who slid down the bank to be as close as possible to the action. The mysterious sound was revealed as being legions of men, women and children skating along the frozen river anxious to be present to witness the scene. Queues built up around the lady selling hot chestnuts and the man retailing gin as excitement mounted.

Then along the ice came a man with a broom, sweeping away the snow that had accumulated on the prepared route. Excitement mounted as two figures could be seen approaching, seemingly tied side by side. So they were, connected by a piece of rope, forcing spectators out of the way for the speeding figures behind them.

Excitement rose as one by one the beaten skaters joined the others crowding each side of the course, some encroaching on to the prepared route, which was kept clear by men with besoms.. Smith had caught a fleeting glimpse of Gittam in his flannel drawers, a silk handkerchief on his head and the coloured Indian silk handkerchief of Young, the winner. Then it was time to seek the water of life – gin – from an old vendor who as the crowds departed had told him something of the origin of the sport.

The winter of 1820 had been particularly hard, both land and river had frozen solid causing great distress amongst the fenmen of Nordelph. Two had decided to seek their fortune elsewhere, the gin-seller beneath Carter's Bridge had informed Smith. John Young and John Gittam had made the journey up to Crowland to see whether they could win enough to feed their families through the period of depression. They challenged two local brothers, John and Charles Staples to race over a two-mile course for a prize of five pounds. Young was favourite having already gained a reputation as a speed skater; he set off in good style and soon built up a lead, only to be overtaken by Charles Staples a few yards from the flag. Next it was brother John against Gittam and this time the visitor was victorious. In the final both contestants were equally matched but it was the Nordelph man who skated home first.

The two Johns were amongst the competitors who had journeyed along the Well Creek to a contest on the river near the brewery at Wisbech in January 1823. This time it was Young who came out victorious, carrying home the prize of ten pounds in a time of five minutes thirty-three seconds for the two-mile course. Now they were challenging the famous Drake brothers from Chatteris on their own home ice. One had repeated the amazing voyage of the Lord Orford in reverse, journeying in 1799 from Whittlesey Mere right across the Middle and South Levels to Mildenhall without taking off his skates but with no glimpse of an alligator, hippopotamus or even dolphin.

In all sixteen well-known skaters were present, including Varlow from Benwick, Hare of Littleport, Middleditch from Reach, Minnot of Manea, Cave of Sutton and both Burgess and Richardson from Whittlesey. Their names went into the hat to see who competed against who in the first round and there were murmurings of discontent after both Chatteris men, Drake and Angood were defeated.

Then the victors were paired so that those who were equally matched would strain each other to the full. The result saw Green from March, Bradford from Farcett and May from Upwell go through to the next heat. The final place was to be decided in a contest between the Nordelph duo, Young wearing his distinctive coloured Indian silk handkerchief against his local rival, the rarely beaten fenland champion Gittam in his accustomed racing outfit of flannel drawers. This time it was the younger man who proved victorious.

By now the day was warming up a little, prompting fears that the competition might not be decided after all. Areas of ice were melting, leaving the organisers wondering what to do for the best. For it was no easy thing, arranging a skating match. First there had to be a sufficient period of cold weather to freeze the ice and give time for competitors to be told that races were actually to take place. It was not usual for men to skate miles along the fenland rivers only to find the event cancelled – and worse that the ice had thawed, making their return journey a much longer undertaking as they plodded along the tops of the banks in a biting wind with their useless skates slung over their shoulders.

Then they had to prepare the course which involved working through much of the night, sweeping away snow either side of a central line along a straight section of river. Next it had to be carefully measured to ensure a full two-mile track before empty barrels were positioned at each end round which the skaters would turn. This was thirsty work so it was customary for a full barrel of beer to be supplied to slake the thirst of the course-builders, but there was a problem. For as the temperature fell it was not just the water that froze; those seeking refreshment found the beer had iced up. So one strong man was removed from the labour gang and ordered to cuddle the barrel until he had imparted sufficient warmth to unfreeze it.

Now spectators were pressed into action to clear a new length of ice so that the finals could be run. Soon men with ropes hurtled down the river clearing the onlookers for the battling duo behind them; it was neck and neck as Young and Bradford strained every sinew whilst still maintaining the essential rhythm of their style. It was the Nordelph man who reached the

winning flag first while the Chatteris band in their barge played lustily but pointlessly, their cacophony of sound being drowned by the cheers of half-frozen spectators who faced the long journey back to their cottage hearths, some falling over on the way because of the icy ground, others as a result of the gin-man's potent brew.

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Elliott Smith had watched as the crowds staggered away from the scene of the skating contest on the frozen Forty Foot, some hobbling as the result of an injury sustained on the ice. Then he'd spotted the frail figure of the gin man struggling to scramble up the bank with what remained of his supplies. Ever one to assist, Smith had offered a hand and together they made their way to an isolated cottage alongside the bank. There by the warmth of a peat fire he'd learn something of the history of skating, a mixture of history and legend fuelled by a little liquor and a lot of loneliness

"The fen boys don't like to think anybody knows better than them; but one winter hundreds of years ago they noticed French monks from Ely Cathedral were venturing into their area. Well they tried to chase them off, but the strangers could go faster than them across the ice. You see fenmen used a pair o' bones as skates, but these bors was wearing somethin' different on their feet. So what they did was for some to hide up in some reeds between Ely and Portly Hill. Another lot hid up a bit fudder away and by and by along came the furriners, skating along a narrow pathway between the reeds. When they'd passed, the first Fenmen came out o' hidin' and set to and smashed up the ice in the pathway, for a few yards. Then they waited – but not for long. Back them furriners came, hell for leather, with the other Fenmen behind them, shoutin' as if there were hundeds 'on 'em.

"Well o'course when the fust one reached the broken ice, in he dropped and it weren't long afore the hull lot of them were standin' there up to their necks in slub and water, surrounded by a group of hairy Fenmen. If any tried to get out o' the 'ole he were shoved back agin, but when the Fenmen decided they were well soaked, with their teeth a chatterin' in the cold, they yanked 'em out. Then it was they found out what they'd got fastened on their feet what made 'em able to goo so fast. All were wearin' wooden shoes with a strip of iron fixed in the soles. They took these away from them and then chased them back to Ely across what they call Padnal Fen – thas how it got its name, because those furriners had to pad barefoot acrorst the ice to git back to Ely.

"Well, the Fenmen, pleased as could be, sets on back to where they lived, and when they got there, they tried on the furriners' skates. They felt a bit strange on 'em at fust, but arter a bit o' practice they found they were a lot faster 'n their 'ole bone skates. Then one day they come acrorst an old chap gropin his way because he was blind. He was one of them French monkies but because he'd done suffin' he shouldn't, they had put his eyes out and turned him loose. So the Fenmen feelin' a bit sorry for him like, took him home and looked arter him, 'cos 'ee were nearly a dunner. They fed him and he picked up arter a bit. One day they saw him whittlin' away some blocks of wood just like the shape of the furriners skates - he bein' a furriner himself o' course. He said that as a boy, he did a lot of skating on the marshes near his home, and the things they wore was called 'pattens'. He showed them how to make 'em.

"Then years later there were a high flood one year, and a Dutch ship came in past Lynn on its way to Cambridge, when a gurt storm blew up and it were wrecked the other side o' Southery. Only one man was saved alive. Now this shipwrecked chap was called De Wit and set hisself up as a blacksmith to make and mend the things that the old Fenmen used in them days - fish dags, eel glaves, chains and anchors and sich things. But the fust winter there came hard frorst, he were give the order to make a pair of pattens. He told his customer he din't understand what that meant and when told they were things to goo about with on ice he said,

'You mean "Schaats.'" They showed him a pair o' pattens, but he said he could make suffin better'n that, same as they used in Holland. It were longer'n the pattens they were used to and it had a steel blade what turned up at the toe. The Fenmen din't like the look of that toe turned up as much as the Dutchman made it, 'cos it turned so high up like a curved horn. They said it were only an ornament and Fenmen argerd and argerd till in the end , cos the Dutchman said the turn up were best, they agreed to let him make it, but not so big as he wanted. And as you know that's how they're bin made ever since in the Fens - only we call them Fen Runners".

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Sitting in a tumbled-down cottage beside the Forty Foot River near Chatteris Elliott Smith had at first found some difficulty in understanding what the gin man told him. But slowly he managed to interpret something of the man's interesting life. His dad had been John Evans from Stonea, his mum Mary Skinner from Chatteris. They'd been brought together not so much by love as by John Clarke, the parish constable, once it became noticed that Mary was getting somewhat larger than a single woman ought to do. Constable Clarke had been dispatched to bring the reluctant bridegroom to the church door, taking three other men with him for support.

Although Stonea was a small place, John knew every inch and it took the pursuers two days to track him down, spending the night at the Cross Keys where they munched and drank their way through thirteen shilling's worth of parish money. Then they'd had to hire horses to go to March for a licence, paying the turnpike tolls on the way. What with marriage fees and something for the clerk it all added up to a bill of over £3.8.10. "Dad always said that if they'd have just given him half of that then he'd have married her without all that fuss", he'd been told

Although the marriage had been happy, their married life had not. In 1788 the family had been ensconced in Chatteris workhouse, an old ramshackled building. That was the year that the Vestry meeting had decided something needed to be done so they raised an assessment on all ratepayers to provide funds for a new building with 200,000 bricks made out of earth to be dug on the Common near Slade Bridge. The parish was to supply the necessary implements for their manufacture and pay for everything with ready money. At least it meant there was work and John had been one of those found a job. Once the bricks were ready there was a mass meeting to sort out just where the workhouse would go and how much it would cost. They agreed on a total of £400 to cover brickwork and carpentry, and again John had been fortunate enough to be employed in the building.

Although the vestry were concerned to keep the price as low as possible they had to pay out more for a turf hovel for peat firing, for a garden and fences. But they economised by transferring some of the fittings of the old workhouse to the new one. Now they needed a Master and after great agonising decided to pay for an advertisement in the Cambridge Chronicle newspaper, edited by Francis Hodson. A certain Thomas Hodson had responded who was appointed for three years. In exchange for £300 paid by the Overseers yearly, he'd undertook to feed and clothe the poor and thus relieve the parish of its responsibilities in the matter. This was not a very satisfactory arrangement for the inmates, especially as Hodson expected to make something out of the deal and had under-estimated the costs. He tried to do things as cheaply as possible but by 1795 affairs had got into a shocking state through his mismanagement. A Committee of Inspection reported a two guineas 'deficiency' which he was compelled to pay out of his salary with the Overseers ordered to supply what necessaries were lacking. When Hodson relinquished his post in 1797, Thomas Nichols a sack-maker of St. Ives became master at an increased payment of £380 per annum. But he turned out to be worse than his predecessor and after two years was ordered to quit and told if he went

peaceably he was to have five pounds. After another attempt - equally unsatisfactory - of appointing a master for three years, they'd agreed to elect one yearly at the Easter Vestry. Year after years they kept adding to the duties to be performed, with suitable penalties for neglect and as the years passed, the list became longer and more elaborate. But now that he had a little money Evans had been able to leave the workhouse behind him.

Instead he'd added to his income by looking after the parish fire engine cleaning, oiling and testing it at Michael-mass and May Day. A new engine-house had been built in the churchyard with six large firehooks and twelve large scoops provided - the former for dragging burning thatch from roofs and the latter for baling water from flooded houses. Then wells had been dug in various parts of the town to ensure an adequate water supply should always be available in case of fire including a Town Well with pump in East Park Street. Finally in 1808 the parish had established a fire brigade paying eighteen pence each to twenty men to work the engine as required, with tests carried out four times a year. Things had been going well – and that was before the stocks.

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Chatteris was not really that lawless, the gin man explained – apart from Mumping Day, four days before Christmas. That's when old men and women, together with women who aren't so old, go round house to house begging alms. A great many of the inhabitants gave a penny to each mumper, others to just the widows or widowers.

Inevitably some of it ended up in the alehouse and some of the mumpers ended up in the stocks. Things had got so boisterous that a few years ago the parish decided they needed to increase the capacity of the stocks and commissioned a new design. It was made to take two prisoners at a time, they sit side by side separated by a cross-rail with their ankles trapped but double wooden bars have leg-holes used which are hinged to let the inmates in and out but then be firmly fastened together by padlocks. This 'engine' is portable, it runs on four small solid wooden wheels. They put a handle in a projecting arm and drag it to the door of the Police Court where the offenders start their sentence before being hauled to the Market Hill for another spell – it saves them getting bored looking at the same view.

Chatteris is now quite a thriving community – the population's doubled in the last 30 years - and is looking to thrive even more, Elliott Smith related. It used to be a market town, centuries ago, but then the fens flooded so often and the roads were so bad that nobody would travel to it. Now things are improving after a group of fifty of the leading townsmen called a meeting four years ago at the George Inn to try and get the market reinstated. They think that with so much corn now being grown, together with the great quantities of stock, that it should be a successful venture.

But success is not something Chatteris is good at. In the olden days it used to have a nunnery for noble ladies but they were not very competent and were swindled by everybody who had a connection with them. They got themselves into such financial problems that they had to take in lodgers, ladies who paid a lump sum in exchange for bed and board as long as they lived. Mind you the nuns were no better than they ought to be, some of them got involved in scandals and most took to keeping pet dogs, cats and birds. You can imagine the disruption that caused, especially as they took them to church with them.

It got worse after much of the abbey church burnt down, along with the parish church. They were both rebuilt but then they started squabbling about which bit of their abbey was theirs and which bit could be used by the rest of the parish. After Henry VIII got round to dissolving the monasteries the nuns' church was pulled down and the stones used in various other bits of town buildings.

Now only one bit remains largely intact, the old Guest House, and that was converted into Park House with old Norman doorways and arches. It was rebuilt over the years with a massive central chimney and should be one of the main treasures of the town. Now it's falling into ruins and won't be there very much longer.

But there's evidence of the past buried all round. Several antique curiosities have been dug up when excavating for gravel. In 1824, an earthen vessel containing about 1,000 copper coins was ploughed up about two miles from the village. They were of Roman origin, chiefly of the emperors Constantius and Constantine, then there was a double edged sword, the hilt embossed with figures of men fighting and part of an elephant was found ten feet below the surface of the ground. Then in a tumulus near the fen turnpike, they discovered several human skeletons, with a spear, part of a shield, an earthen urn, a glass vase and other articles supposed to belong to some British king buried there. This was, when discovered, in a perfect state of preservation but has now deteriorated. At least those men had rested in piece for a bit – not like at Doddington!

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Doddington should be the safest place in the fens; it was one of the largest villages in the country and full of military men who got very tetchy if not properly addressed, Elliott Smith explained

It all started when Napoleon was threatening to invade in 1798 and the call went out for men who would come forward to fight the foe. Doddington enrolled a troop of Yeomany Cavalry with Captain Owen Gray as their leader. Many of the old village familes enrolled: there were two Johnsons - Hardy was a Lieutenant and William a Cornet, two Matthews – Quartermaster John and Sergeant-Major William - with a Taylor as the Trumpeter. They were the men who were going to save the village from the advancing enemy, something Napoleon must have heard about, because he never came into the parish.

The group remained in readiness for thirty years until King George IV disbanded them in December 1827. He ordered that the officers should retain their rank and honour, so now you see Captain Pratt and Lieutenant Culledge strutting around the area, still thinking they can give the orders. But the lesser men can't see why they can't keep their ranks too? It causes great problems: if you confuse Quartermaster Thomas Gray with Sergeant-Major John Gray then there's ructions and when Charles Dobson and James Holmes get together they'll squabble over who was the senior Sergeant. John Household insists on being called 'Cornet' and John Johnson wants you to know he was a Standard Bearer. Then there are more than 20 privates including one named French, a Pope, a Goodman, Provost and Pratt – which is how most of the village regards them all!

You'd think that in such a military place one thing they'd be able to do is to stop the dead being stolen. But in November 1828 a hamper was taken to the Horse and Gate inn, Chatteris and booked by the Wisbech coach to London. The clerk, a nosy sort of chap, noticed that the string which fastened the lid had broken, so he peeked inside. He soon wished he hadn't – it contained were three dead bodies, one woman, two babies. Well everybody was in uproar, especially those who'd recently buried loved ones. One grave was opened by the parents and found to contain just the clothes in which the body had been wrapped up in.

Well at Doddington they were just about bury a local woman and got so worried that the relations decided to keep watch over her grave, day and night. Just after midnight they heard a cart trundling along the road, so they hid down in the bushes. Then they saw two men coming across the grass, carrying spades and watched as they started to dig into the fresh-filled grave.

It was then that their military training broke down, one of the watchers made a noise, alerting the bodysnatchers who ran off, leaving their spades behind them.

But even the church doesn't respect religious relics any more. There's an old post mill owned and administered by the Churchwardens and Overseers for the poor of the parish. It revolves around a strong central post with the main body of the mill several feet above ground level, making it a high step up. When the wooden steps rotted away the Rector said they could have some old stones that were laying in the grass near the church. But these are the remains of an ancient Calvary which some say it should be left where it is

The mill's been in the Johnson family for hundreds of years. They even issued their own coinage back in 1669 when there was a shortage of copper for pennies; he had some halfpenny tokens minted with his name on one side and a picture of the mill on the other.

But one Doddington fortune has been lost forever. Back in the 1750s Robert Clive – of India - was on his way back to Bombay in a convoy of five ships. Although Clive was aboard the Stretham his chest of coins was on a much faster vessel named the Doddington. But she met heavy weather near the Cape of Good Hope and ran on to rocks off Bird Island in Algoa Bay, where it was smashed to pieces within 20 minutes. Only 23 of the 270 passengers and crew survived. Some of the silver and plate aboard the Doddington was washed ashore and squabbled over by the survivors. But the gold has never been found.

566

Elliott Smith had unfortunate remembrances of Doddington, for one day, early in his auctioneering career, he had journeyed deep out into the fens to visit a property only to find that nobody in the parish had heard of it, or the supposed vendor. He had even made his way out to Benwick where the houses were built straight on the quaking peat soil – or so it seemed. Builders claimed that there was a gravel bed just beneath the surface which would provide a firm foundation, but it seemed that walls that should have been straight were leaning at a somewhat odd angles. Not that there were many of them, just a few old cottages occupied by paupers and a Great House that provided home to a few more.

Wimblington, a hamlet of less than 1,000 souls, together with the even smaller communities of Hook and Eastwood End had proved equally fruitless. Neither George Cannon, the landlord of the Chequers at Boots Bridge or Thomas Setchel at the Anchor had been able to offer any guidance as to the elusive property. Eventually after a long and fruitless search Elliott had retraced his hoof prints back towards Cambridge only to find himself caught in a storm of such ferocity that the ferryman at Mepal had been reluctant to convey him across the flooded washland. It was then that fortune had smiled on him and he'd been led along the river bank to an ancient mansion that rejoiced in the name of Fortrey's Hall. The house, he learned, had been built by one of the richest men in England.

The Fortreys had been Dutch ship-owners who had settled in England during the reign of Queen Elizabeth, bringing their wealth with them. In 1631 Samuel Fortrey built himself a palatial residence in the village of Kew, about ten miles from the centre of London. It was country house of red brick with curved Dutch gables and suited the family's exulted position.

Samuel became a favourite at court where he urged the King and his courtiers to wear British, rather than French fashions and argued that the country should concentrate on things which would bring greater economic advantage. Why grow corn to export when we could breed cattle that brought in more profit out of which we could buy corn from abroad and still have

plenty of money left over. And, stressed Samuel, the fenland should be properly converted from a marshy wetness to good profitable arable land.

The initial scheme by Cornelius Vermuyden, funded by the Earl of Bedford and his backers, had seen a new river dug from Earith through to join the Great Ouse near Salter's Lode. Its success had been endorsed by a mass meeting at St Ives, enabling the men who had adventured their fortunes – and drained their purses – to be rewarded with the grant of acreages of newly-dry land. But when put to the test the new river had proved to be totally ineffective and the scheme pronounced a failure. There the matter had rested until after the Civil War when another attempt had been made. Despite reservations Vermuyden had been commissioned to dig a newer and more substantial river alongside the first, with washlands between and banks to keep the water in.

By now many of the earlier financiers were either dead, broke or disenchanted with the whole idea. One of the new backers was Samuel Fortrey. Once more there had been years of hard work before the new scheme was pronounced a success and Samuel could claim his share of the land that was to be his reward. But those self-same acres had already been allocated to the original set of adventurers, so now it was back to the courts to try and decide who really should have what. It had been a long battle that had left many, including Vermuyden himself, in severe financial problems.

But Samuel came out of it successfully. He build himself a grand new house in the fens and his Kew house became a favourite residence for the Royal Family. It was purchased by King George III who found it large enough for his extensive family and sufficiently rural to serve as a retreat from formal court life. It was here that the king had convalesced in 1801 during one of his bouts of mental illness.

567

Had the ailing King George III visited Fortrey's Hall, deep in the fens beyond Mepal he might have found a cure for his madness, according to Elliott Smith. For just a few miles away was the village of Somersham. Its a pleasant enough little place that got its old name, Summersum, after a neighbouring hill that was the summer camp of the Romans. The Bishop of Ely once had a noble palace here that was converted into a good manor house and was the residence of the late Thomas Hammond till a few years ago when it was entirely pulled down by the Duke of Manchester. It stood a short distance westwards from the church - a noble and spacious building in a good state of repair all, with the exception of the chancel, covered over with a thick stucco partly composed of small gravely pebbles.

The village provides employment for a considerable number of men and women who scour the fens for rushes that they make into candles called rush lights which are sent all over England. But it might have become as famous as Bath for its mineral waters, if Dr Layard had been successful.

Several places in Huntingdonshire used to have special springs of different kinds. There was the Huntingdon Horse-Common water, which was remarkable for its softness, and the pure limpid spring in Holywell churchyard, more famed for its great purity than any medicinal property. Then you had the chalybeate waters of St. Agnes' well at Papworth and a very strong briny spring in a close belonging to Sir Robert Bernard at Bury near Ramsey.

More well-known were the purgative salt waters at Hail-Weston where there were three wells of different properties very near each other; people flocked to drink them, usually staying at St. Neots or St. Ives. From there they were only a few miles from the Somersham spa where the water issued from the slope of a small hill on the heath. Nobody knows when its

miraculous properties were first discovered - certainly 200 years ago - but afterwards it became neglected.

It was revived under the patronage of the Bishop of Ely, Dr. Moore and received a boost after Dr John Addenbrooke of Cambridge and Dr. Fullwood of Huntingdon examined the water and made use of it in their practices. Then His Grace William, Duke of Manchester, together with Viscount Hinchingbrooke, the Bishop of Lincoln and many of the prominent gentry and clergy in the counties of Cambridge and Huntingdon, joined in a subscription for erecting a house near the spring. Thanks to the Rev. Dr. Samuel Knight, Rector of Bluntisham, a building was fitted up with a bowling green and proper accommodation for the expected rush of visitors. Sadly they stayed away

But when the fashion for mineral water began again in 1759, Dr Peter Layard decided to resurrect the spa and publicise it for his own gain. He leased the land on which it stood at a yearly rent of £2 6s, bottled the water for sale and hoped to make his fortune. He failed. Now few people remember that it was ever there, but all it needs is one royal visit and who knows what could happen.

Recently farmers have been turning to new ways to maximise their income. About 20 years ago Jonathan Ilett planted a fine orchard with most sorts of the best fruit trees; people said they'd never flourish on fenland, but they do – and so they would in all the fens now they are well drained. William Margetts has an orchard of 16 acres with all sorts of apples, pears, plums and cherries. On the outside there is a border of red filberts mixed with orlean - French apples - and greengage plums, and the western side is planted with swan egg pears to shelter the orchard from the winds. Nearby the Rev. John Ingle, a dissenting minister, has another with all sorts of the choicest fruit trees which are very healthful and promising. Most are making a fair living, though some like Jeremiah Mosely can always find something to moan about.

568

After an evening spent in the hospitable ancient Fortrey's Hall Elliott Smith had taken the small private brick bridge across the Old Bedford River and made his way back towards the main road where he spied the ferryman on the Chatteris side, waiting to convey him across. The man had been somewhat annoyed to have lost his custom: his was a precarious living; often the river was so low that people could just wade across, at other times when floods came it was impossible to see where the river ended and the washlands began.

As Elliott had jogged from one river to the other he spotted something that he'd never seen before. It was a barge making its way across what seemed dry land. Maintaining river banks needed a special type of clay that fenmen called 'gault' which was extracted from pits at various points and one such was located just across the New Bedford. But when clay was needed to repair the bank of the Old Bedford just a few yards opposite it meant a very tortuous boat journey all the way down to Earith, out into the Great Ouse and then all the way back again. So somebody had had the idea of digging a canal across the washes, though as the water in one river could well be higher than in the other they'd needed to construct a lockgate as well.

Crossing the New Bedford was an old wooden bridge that had been made by those Adventurers like Samuel Fortrey as part of the second phase of drainage. Few appreciated that their money had gone not only to finance rivers but also roads – like the Ireton's Way to Chatteris, named after Cromwell's brother-in-law. They'd also built a number of inns that nestled alongside the bank - something Mepal seemed to have a surfeit of, doubtless sustained by the bargees who offloaded their goods and the carriers who conveyed them to the

neighbouring villages. One of the principal employers was the coal merchant whose name, Bridgford, seemed appropriate in a village with such a means of river crossings.

After a quick glance into the church, which contained a memorial to the hospitable Fortrey family, Smith had climbed the steep slope to the top of the island of Ely and made his way to the great lighthouse that dominated the surrounding fenland. St Andrew's church at Suttonwas the pride of the area with a double octagonal lantern mirroring that of Ely cathedral. Inside it contained a reminder of turbulent days: a seated, mutilated body, its stone head, feet and arms hacked off – some say by Cromwell.

It was not the church he had come to see but the man who lived at its gate. He was one of the wealthiest men in the area but a man who was in constant conflict with the parson whose wages he helped to pay. William Wright was a farmer who'd had the misfortune to lose both parents by the time he was two years old. He'd been apprenticed to a grocer and tallow chandler at Ramsey, rising at three in the morning on candlemaking days and opening the shop promptly at six. He delighted to tell how one day a little boy had come to the shop and asked for a hap'orth of cheese. The grocer had been unwilling to disappoint the chap but could not see how he could make so small a quantity; he would however make a pennyworth – which the lad agreed to. When the cheese was cut and placed before him the boy drew out a knife, sliced it in two, picked up one half, threw down his coin and retreated saying "that's how to make a hap'orth of cheese". William had enjoyed the work but fate intervened; having paid £20 to get into the grocery trade he had to pay another £30 to get out of it when he'd needed to leave before his term had expired to take on the family farm at Sutton.

He and his wife, Sarah, made their home in a substantial three-storey house where they grew children, five of each and made a good living during the bad times of the Napoleonic war when farmers were needed to feed a country under threat of French blockade. Even when the fighting was over he'd managed to avoid the destitution that had befallen others, growing barley, oats, wheat, beans and hay but also building up his livestock – bullocks, pigs and sheep that he bought a hundred at a time and fattened for market. And it was them that added to his problem with the parson

569

William Wright was a prosperous farmer who lived in a large house opposite the door of Sutton church. It was not a church he chose to enter, yet despite not hearing the parson preach, William's work helped keep the cleric fed.

For like all farmers, William had to pay a tithe to the church on all his produce. In many places these had been commuted into money payments which were fixed so that as inflation rose, the actual value went down. But not so in Sutton where collection continued to be taken in kind – one bushel in every ten, each tenth sheep – meaning the church benefited by the farmer's increased production. However since harvests varied from years to year, who could be sure just what had been safely gathered in, leaving tithe-collectors constantly feeling they had been short-changed.

In 1831 Sutton farmers wrote to the vicar praying for relief as their harvest had failed. Sadly the reverend gentleman was unable to see his way clear to reduce his take - even though his income had increased five-fold during his incumbency. It was a shame they'd had to write – but they'd no other option, for the vicar was never resident in the parish.

William was never in a hurry to pay; he always waited until court proceedings had been implemented and he'd been served with a distraint warrant, giving the tithe-man the right to enter his property to seize goods to be sold to raise the money. He knew that tithe gatherers could take no more than their due – they could take half a bushel, but they could not take half

a sheep. So when a lamb realised more than expected the change had to be returned. Except William refused to accept it.

His brother-in-law, John Brown of Earith, was another protestor. He watched as hay, wheat, beans, barley, oats, goods, furniture, chairs, pewter and best bed (worth £10) were carried off and sold. He saw his cows and sheep taken away, but his love for his favourite horse was too great. Just before the appointed day he ordered his foreman to take it down into the fen – he was willing to lose his bed, but not that!

Though tithes were irksome to every farmer, for William they were a matter of conscience. For he was a Quaker and opposed them as a matter of religious principle. He was one of the trustees of the new Sutton Meeting House that had been built in 1830 with space for 150 people. Inside the Friends sat very quiet and still on hard wooden benches. Each wore his hat, for to them every place and every part of life was equally holy. There was no hymn book, no prayer book or preacher. The silence continued throughout the Meeting, interrupted only if someone felt moved to stand up and address the gathering, read a passage from the Bible or say a prayer. It was something William never did. He sat until he felt the time was right, then pushed his rush hassock under his seat with the end of his walking stick to indicate that the meeting was over.

A Meeting at which a marriage was solemnised was very similar. There was no special wedding service, but at a point which was determined by the couple they made their declaration before God and the gathering. It was a procedure that William and his wife Sarah had followed and he watched with approval as his son, John, courted Mary Merrick, another Quaker. Yet when the elders gathered on St Valentine's day 1832 it was not to approve the marriage, but to denounce their immoral and disorderly conduct, so contrary to their beliefs that they were disowned by the church. William's own reactions as he attended that meeting can only have been imagined, yet he endorsed the sentiments expressed, hoping his lad might live to see the error of his ways and be brought to a state of true repentance

For his son's wedding had taken place in an Anglican church in the city of London. What was worse was that at the reception afterwards there had been gaiety, dancing and even the consumption of alcohol. Yet William himself had made much of his fortune as a brewer!

570

William Wright was a Quaker who became a malster. He constructed a ninety-foot long maltings with two granaries capable of holding nearly seven tons of grain which he soaked in water for three days until it spouted, then dried it gently in a kiln until it was ready to be milled and used for brewing ale. Soon this side of his empire was proving a most profitable enterprise.
William brewed some ale for his household needs, running a spout across the yard to carry the beer from the vat to the casks, but most he sold on. There were plenty of customers. In Sutton alone there were some two-dozen public or beer houses to cater for the needs of one-and-a-half-thousand villagers. Most of the publicans had other jobs – John Briggs at the Crown took in five lodgers and had a butcher's shop on the premises, as did William Bradshaw at the Ship. James Meeks, a blacksmith, slaked his thirst at his own Red Lion while the Six Bells - that had once belonged to the Wright family – was now kept by Susan Whitfield.

Then to farming and brewing William added another enterprise: milling. He'd originally inherited a windmill in Towns End Field from his brother in 1778, but had sold it off. It was a precarious business: people still talked of the hurricane that had blown down all the mills in the area, apart from the one at Bluntisham. There the miller had braved the storm to secure his smockmill, only to be crushed to death between the stones and one of the large beams. Even

so, when one of the mills in Sutton burnt down William realised it opened up a new opportunity, especially when he heard that the owner did not propose to rebuild.

Thanks to the profits made during the war with Napoleon his income had been flourishing so in 1801 he'd decided to construct a completely new smock mill, with three pairs of stone driven by patent sails on a cap that could be rotated to make best use of the wind. He chose a site on the Mepal Road, the highest part of the parish from which Ely Cathedral was clearly visible. No sooner was it up and working than the burnt mill was rebuilt. Despite the unexpected competition William expanded again, acquiring another post mill. He was soon buying in grain from fellow farmers and selling it on to mealmen, making a profit on each transaction.

But mills needed to be maintained and the bills from Hunts of Soham mounted up. Even at Sutton you could not rely on the wind blowing every day so in 1833 he decided to invest in a new steam mill. It meant he had to learn about boilers and furnaces, dig reservoirs for the water to power the engine, lay out pipes and tanks as well as construct a flour chamber, meal warehouse and blacksmith's shop together with a counting house for all the anticipated income.

Everything was of the best quality with the engines built and installed by Maudslay and Field of Lambeth, a firm famous for its engineering. Such equipment did not come cheap – the whole lot must have cost him nearly £6,000. It was a brave gamble that seemed destined to fail. The costs involved in transporting the materials and erecting the mill had been much more than anticipated. Then there was the expense of keeping it running: the engines consumed more coal than expected, all of which had to come down the river from King's Lynn and then carted overland for the final two miles. Frustratingly when wind mills were becalmed William's steam mill was also standing idle waiting for some repair or other and even when it was working it seemed underpowered.

Still everything might have worked out except that a few years ago he'd had passed the management of the mill over to his son. The lad could not settle to the task; he set off to London to make his fortune, only to find himself deep in debt. Now rumour had it that the Wright's money was running out and that William might be thinking of selling off some of his land – which was why Elliott Smith, the auctioneer, always took the opportunity to call when in the area.

571

The area around Sutton comprised a number of little communities, some of which contained big characters. None was more remarkable than David Cox of Wardy Hill, a small hamlet on a track between Witcham and Coveney. He was a remarkable man who had already made a name for himself in local folklore.

Elliott Smith had visited his thatched cottage, now looking a little unloved on the exterior but full of love inside. It had provided a home for David and his wife until he had achieved the ripe old age of 76 years. But then the inevitable happened and the good lady passed away. David was devastated and many of his neighbours thought he would never recover from his loss. But he was to surprise them all.

What happened next was recorded in a verse, which Smith recited

Fifteen years went sailing round
Since David placed her in the ground;
But then a fair one crossed his path,
Says he "My dear, you'd grace my hearth;

I have two chairs, one is empty,
But in the cupboard food is plenty;
You have my heart, let us shake hands,
Tomorrow I'll put up the bands".

Well, as might be expected such a marriage caused something of a stir in the locality:

At Coveney church, the folks all stared
When the parson had declared
That David Cox, at ninety-one,
With matrimony had not done.

The church was covered in with thatch,
The steeple made of wood to match,
Where Mrs. Palmer dropped that name
As Mrs. Cox she would then claim.

It was a union made in heaven with the less-than-blushing bride in her 90s!

But she was not very long contented,
Though she had been thus cemented,
But did her David 's side discard,
And was laid down in the churchyard.

Soon however he found a new companion in the shape of Mary Gothard

Now Mrs Gothard, creature kind,
Immediately made up her mind,
Told David, with a pleasing air,
What said the world, she did not care

Rather than he should live alone
She'd come at once, and be his own;
Such self-denial, thus displayed,
David was too old to be afraid.

He took at once this buxom dame
To Coveney church and changed her name;
Her love I'm told was so sincere,
He smoked his pipe, she drank the beer.

After their wedding on 25th June 1833 they seemed to get on well

When out driving with ass and trap,
Lest poor David should take a nap,
She fed him on the way with candy,
But herself prefer'd some brandy.

But it was not to last long

Bliss on earth has short duration,
She was seized with inflammation;
The doctor's skill was all in vain,
David was left alone again.

Here Elliott Smith paused for breath, glanced around the Little Rose coffee house, then restarted his tale.

572

By the time he neared his hundred birthday of age David Cox of Wardy Hill had already buried three wives, he ought to have been used to it; but the death of Mary Gothard hit him hard.

But now this was a bitter cup,
He felt his tears would not dry up;
Till Mrs. Thimble came to read,
And sympathise with him indeed.

Saying “Pray, my dear, don't make a fuss,
I am by birth a monthly nurse,
I know indeed your troubles great,
I understand the widowed state.

Now my, it's my belief
That I can give you great relief,
At cooking I am very good,
If only I can get the food.

I know well how to drive an ass,
And catch him too, when out at grass;
Can wash and iron, knit and mend,
But praise myself I don't intend.

At nursing perfect in my day,
At least that's what the ladies say”
“Enough's been said” the old man cried
You shall be mine, my tears are dried”.

“You cheer my heart, you do in truth,
Revive the vigour of my youth”
Says she “Now was there ever seen,
Such a glorious evergreen”.

So in 1833 he married once more, this time to Susan Thimblety. They did the job in some style:

Her bridal dress was soon complete,
And new boots for her pretty feet,
The donkey's head was trimmed with blue,
The harness cleaned to look like new.

As they drove up to the church gate,
They looked like Royalty in state,
They drove back home in joyful pride.
His very loving, blooming bride,

In that dear house, had found a place,
Where all was harmony and grace.
So happy man, I never knew

Whose age was then, one hundred and two.

But love, tranquillity and grace,
To death has always given place,
Against her will, poor Susan went,
Up to a world of great content.

That loss really hit the old boy, he's quite given up any thought of matrimony again – though some gossips say he does have a young lady pop in from time to time!

At least he'd not experienced the problems that had beset the Worsters at Ely. John and Mary were a loving couple too. Both were local folk – she was a Sheerman before they married in 1807 - he was a butcher on the Fore Hill. Their union had been blessed with a son, John who'd died in 1832, aged 25. To bury one son is a tragedy but another son, Samuel, died the following year, aged 24, then a third son James died in 1835, aged 11. But in addition there'd been a Sarah, a Susanna, two Anns, two Elizabeths, three Elizas, and eight Richards, most of whom had died between eight and twelve months old! It seemed that no matter how they tried they were destined to outlive any of their children

Such large broods were unusual. Pickwick had heard of the wife of Dr. Phineas Hudson, Chancellor of York, who died in her thirty-ninth year giving birth to her twenty-fourth child, while Mrs. Joseph Cooper of Leeds bore twenty-six and Mrs. William Greenhill of Hertfordshire gave birth to 39. The most prolific seemed to be the wife of a Scotch weaver in Newcastle who bore 62 children by one husband, all of whom lived to be baptised.

573

Coveney stands high on a hill looking across the fenland with a magnificent view of the majestic Ely Cathedral. But its own church, dedicated to St Peter, is a poor mean structure with a square tower, thatched nave and chancel. Inside are some decrepit pews, an old font, ancient pulpit and various commemoration slabs. One to Anne, wife of William Austin the minister reads
Shee's gone, shee's gone; let this put us in Mind,
Who shall survive, that we a'nt far behind,
She's happy too, I trust, her Mem'ry's blest,
Her Name smells sweet in everlasting Rest

Anne was buried in 1708 but in fact her husband wasn't too quick in following: he lived another 17 years and even then was only 44 when he died. A later rector held the living with another at West Bradenham in Norfolk but resided miles away from both at Stilton where he'd married the schoolmaster's widow and kept the school himself. With such absent clergymen the scope for dispute was ever present.

When Elliott Smith had accompanied the Charity enquiry men to Coveney it was obvious that things had not been going properly for some time. A couple of the ancient bequests had completely disappeared and the trustees of another charity had been involved in a court case. It was all to do with the detached area of the parish known as Manea – the site of the colony where it was claimed that money was to be abandoned and the children of the settlers educated to as high a standard as any country gentry.

Back in the 1750s the Lord of the Manor had bequeathed lands and a cottage to be used as a schoolhouse for a master who would educate six poor Manea children, free of charge. Any money left over was to be devoted to charitable purposes. Following inclosure the value of other charity estates had soared; traditionally the income had been used to fund apprenticeships, putting the youngsters to a good trade. But instead of this the trustees had let

the money build up and then erected a new school house. The old building was very small, low and unwholesome, nobody begrudged children an education and there were now 30 youngsters being taught.

But the new school was big enough for 200 scholars – and there was nothing like that number in the locality. The managers had established a Sunday school in an attempt to boost the numbers, increasing the salary of the teacher until they paying him £20 a year for the day school and another £10 for his Sabbath teaching. Any moneys left over would go to the apprentices they claimed – once any building repairs had been met. The problem was that there were no surplus funds, indeed the income could not cover the costs. In July 1834 the money finally ran out so the big new school was closed down. Now they were busily economising and building up enough cash, hoping to reopen it. But with the news of the Colony with their plans for education, things were far from certain.

Then in 1819 other problems had arisen. After four days deliberation the poor who were receiving alms of the parish had made a regular 'O yes! O yes!' proclamation through the streets giving notice that they would meet at the church-yard gate on Easter Monday to take possession of the charity lands out of the hands of the feofees, and divide them amongst themselves. Now this got to the ears of the Rev Sir Henry Bate Dudley at Ely who issued a warrant for the arrest of the ringleaders. Elliott Smith had tried to probe Cox for details, but the old boy had seemed very reluctant to admit to any knowledge. It seems however that the village had dodged a confrontation with the 'Fighting Parson' – and who could blame them.

574

Sir Henry Bate Dudley was well known in the fens for his heroic charge at the head of a troop of cavalry at the Battle of Littleport in 1816. But Pickwick knew him in quite a different context.

As plain Henry Bate he had attended Oxford University but not actually taken a degree. His father bought him a commission in the army but then died, so Henry gave up a fighting career for the life of an Essex country parson. Not that he did much preaching; he put in a curate and went off to London and his real love, the theatre.

Bate had been in the Vauxhall Gardens in the summer of 1773 when he went to the defence of a beautiful actress who was being mocked by a group of effeminate, fashionable young men. It resulted in a challenge to a duel – which was called off – and a boxing match which went ahead. Bate may not have had the fighting prowess of the Squire of Heydon but he defeated his challenger – or rather his challenger's footman - who was sent home with his face a perfect jelly. Thus was his reputation for manly courage established and with it the nickname of the Fighting Parson.

He was also establishing a reputation as a literary man, mixing with luminaries such as William Hogarth and David Garrick and producing a number of comic operas for the Drury Lane Theatre – performances that were frequently interrupted by boos, hisses and cat-calls.

Then he was appointed editor of the Morning Post at the princely salary of four guineas a week. Under his guidance the paper built a reputation as a retailer of coarse social gossip and the circulation rapidly increased. But problems arose in the January of 1777 when he published some unsavoury titbits about the Countess of Strathmore. A bankrupt half-pay Lieutenant, who had already spent a fortune from one diseased wife, demanded to know the name of the correspondent. This was not something the Editor could reveal so Henry found himself once more facing the prospect of a duel.

The two men took a room at the Adelphi where they fired pistols at each other – and missed. Then they turned to swords. In the tussle that followed Bate received a wound in the thigh, but managed to thrust his sword into the soldier's chest, bending it against his breastbone. They parted to straighten the weapon but while the sword was under his foot for that purpose the door was broken open and the contest brought to a premature end. Five days later the brave Lieutenant married the heiress Countess, prompting claims that it had all been a fake fight.

It was by no means Bate's only battle. He disagreed with the proprietors of the Post over the ways of increasing circulation and when they refused to back him called the lot a bunch of cowards. One of them took exception to their Editor's diatribe – the result was a duel with pistols in Hyde Park where Henry proved the better shot.

Then the Reverend Henry Bate, squire, justice of the peace and editor of a scandalous newspaper, was left a large inheritance by an uncle. Now set up for life he changed his name to Bate Dudley and married the sister of the actress he'd defended in the Vauxhall Gardens.

He continued taking risks but spread one scandal too many and in 1781 was sentenced to twelve months' imprisonment for libel. Sadly the prison had been burnt down during the Gordon Riots so he had to wait for it to be rebuilt before taking his newly-married wife with him into the two front rooms over the entrance to the gaol. There they entertained their friends to dinners and games of cribbage, though one hand went on so long that their guest found himself locked in overnight!

With their Editor out of the way the proprietors of The Morning Post felt brave enough to flex their muscles, and forced him to resign. The 'Fighting Parson' did not go quietly and the struggle ended in another duel. Then, bowing to the inevitable, he set up The Morning Herald in opposition. It was an entirely new kind of newspaper in which scandal, gossip, and ribald assaults were prominent. And so it flourished.

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Henry Bate Dudley was a hated figure in Littleport after he made headlines by leading the charge of troops that had smashed what he'd called the 'Rioters' in 1816. But he'd made his fortune by writing headlines as Editor of a scurrilous newspaper where his many pronouncements on public figures were considered particularly outrageous. Others criticised his own immoral conduct and extravagant habits with questions asked in the Houses of Parliament. He found himself satirised as

A Canonical Buck, Vociferous Bully
A Duellist, Boxer, Gambler & Cully …
A Government Runner of Falsehood a Vender
Staunch Friend to the Devil, the Pope & Pretender
A Managers parasite, Opera Writer
Newspaper Editor, Pamphlet Indictor.

But Henry exercised real political power and was even able to influence the nation's affairs through his newspaper. He was also constantly accused of corruption. In 1781 he received £3,000 from the Government in return for backing the Prime Minister, Lord North, at a time when most newspapers were highly critical of his administration. His paper, The Herald received more from the Treasury in 1784 and during the early 1790s received an annual subsidy of £600. But he retained some independence and did not hesitate to bite at the hand that fed him, once opposing the government line despite receiving £100 from secret service funds.

However the newspaper business could not bring him the social status he sought. He paid £1,500 to ensure that he would be appointed rector of Bradwell-juxta-Mere in Essex once the current old incumbent had died. It was not the bed of roses he'd anticipated, the glebe land was in a ruinous state following flooding, the tenant bankrupt and nobody else would take it on. The church was in a parlous condition with the churchyard being used for grazing hogs. But Dudley was not called the 'Fighting Parson' for nothing. He repaired the church, restored the school and drained the marshes, reclaiming 250 acres from the sea.

He also set about ridding the area of a band of villainous poachers, and enhancing his reputation in the process. The gangs' headquarters was a lonely cottage out in the marsh where, one evening, Dudley knocked on the door. It opened to reveal an ugly band of armed men. "Put your guns away, ye rogues" he ordered and when their leader refused the parson wrestled the pistol away from him, at which the others surrendered. Only then did he call for the constables who had accompanied him.

It was a good tale to tell in the run-down rectory that he transformed into a handsome country house. It became the scene of lavish dinner parties attracting many socialites including Thomas Gainsborough, David Garrick, William Hogarth and Mrs Sarah Siddons. Being a keen master of foxhounds he took his guests hunting. One chase ended at Creeksea Church where the fox scrambled up an ivy-covered buttress onto the roof. It was followed by the Rector and six foxhounds who made the kill above the chancel.

But Essex was too small a canvas. Dudley gave up his newspaper interests and moved to Ireland to continue his religious progress. There he waited for the baronetcy that the Prince of Wales had promised him in return for the pecuniary losses and personal privations he had faced in the prince's 'most confidential service'. It finally came through in 1812 when Henry turned his back on the Emerald isle for the rectory of Willingham. But despite his best efforts he failed to become Dean of Ely.

In 1823 he wrote to the Prime Minister, Lord Liverpool, in an aggrieved mood claiming he was in debt and threatening that unless he received some further preferment he'd publish the contents of a 'private letter' about an 'exalted personage', apparently the Prince of Wales. This threat proved successful; the following December he was given a pension of £300 a year, but died two months later. He was not mourned by the folk of the fens.

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Elliott Smith always took the opportunity of exploring Cambridgeshire's byways when out on his auctioneering rounds. One of these was the Grunty Fen, between Witchford and Stretham. Nestling on its northern shores was Wentworth, a very small community of a few farmers and a few more labourers, one of whom, William Brady, lived in a cottage whose very name summed up the spirit of the times; he called it 'Hungray Hall'.

Its ancient church, sadly out of repair, housed a carved stone figure of its patron, St Peter, holding a key and book, which dated back to Norman times. While this kept guard over the altar another watcher is hidden under the plain font - a carving of a face – demonstrating God's presence in the most unexpected of places. It had been pointed out to him by one of the locals, James Whetstone who had been prepared to act as his guide across Grunty Fen itself.

Leaving the village the track dropped gently down, getting gradually more boggy as it did so, until without local knowledge Smith would have turned back again. There were none of the

great drains to channel the water, it lay in stagnant pools where insects buzzed and frogs croaked. This watery wasteland was the home of snipe and the occasional bittern, of golden plover and quail. These delicacies were caught using three leather pipes like the teats of a cow, each with a whistle-like mouth-piece. When squeezed they gave forth a distinctly quail-like sound, each one quieter than the other. The ‘quailer’ concealed himself in high undergrowth and sounded the first pipe to excite a defiant answer from any quail within hearing, bringing it running towards the interloper. He then used his second pipe, leading the bird to imagine the challenger was making off in alarm, while the third emboldened it to rush headlong in pursuit, only to find itself ensnared the hunter’s net.

Grunty fen was the home of men who knew all such stratagems, a resting place for gypsies who set up their camps on the lower slopes before the dampness became too prevalent. One had forsake the nomadic life completely to become the trusted farm foreman for Squire Pell of Wilburton. Joe was a swarthy little man, with small hands and feet, open forehead and splendid teeth and was as quick and powerful as a fox-terrier. He was a unmistakable figure for each buttonhole was decorated with bits of string or pieces of straw. Whetstone had once picked up the courage to ask what they all meant. “Well, I ‘as to report to the Squire regular and don’t always have a bit of paper handy”, he’d answered – in fact both knew he could neither read nor write. “This one says that 'ere mere Dapper, she ain't foaled yet", then, going down one button, "We ain't quite disannulled the muck-hill in ten acres - I laid out to do it, but one of the old carts broke down. Then the baws are talking about wanting some more wages”. No one is a ‘boy’ on the farm till he’s grown up – most of them are from sixty-five to seventy-five years of age, though shepherds, horsekeepers, thatchers, drillmen, and threshers are called by their title, Whetstone explained. Well the foreman had carried on down the sleeve, then the waistcoat button-holes on the left side, down the left leg gaiter, up the right leg and waistcoat buttons till he’d finished – it made you realise just how much he had to be master of.

His empire was a farm on an island in the middle of Grunty Fen. For several months it was inaccessible except by the boat that was attached to the latch of the door. Here he lived with his brood of children and placid, humble wife, Rachel. “A better or more saintly, industrious creature never exists – she’s never even been to Ely, four miles away, and knows nothing more of the world than she gathers from her Bible and the packman who pays a visit each spring with material for her needle and knitting. But she knows her Old Testament!

“Once a week, when the fen is passable, she makes her husband and the little ones pick their way with her to the Baptist Chapel, wearing the same best bonnet she’s worn all her life. Then when the service is over her husband makes off to the Chequers for his pint and pipe. She gathers her brood round her skirts - the very skirts in which she was married - and gets back over the fen before the light fades away, so she can get to bed without waste of candle, leaving the flint and steel in the tinder-box on the window-ledge for Joe, who’s always home by seven o’clock.

But not all wives are as docile. Take Ria.

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In many ways Ria was the idea Wilburton wife. She was a hard-worker and would regularly make her way to the common where her cow was kept, returning with pails brimming full of milk. It was a long way home so she used her ‘moke’ – a donkey with a stiff pad saddle on his back and a strong yoke-bar over it from which the bright tin pails swung by their handles. Ria rode astride on the animal’s rump and it was a glorious sight to see her disappearing in a gallop with the blaze of the setting sun sending glittering reflections on either side.

She was amongst the first of the women to enter the field as soon as the gleaning bell had been rung, garnering two or three pounds of corn after the harvest men had scythed and gathered their fill. Later her husband John would add his contribution to the family store at flailing time, should he be fortunate enough to gain employment as a thresher. The wage was low but the work was continuous and under cover. It was then that he would seek out the old stove-pipe hat that he only wore at that time of year. Nor did his friends mock his sense of fashion for everybody knew the reason.

When times were hard – as invariably they were – any supplies of grain that could be smuggled out of the barn were to be welcomed. The farmer was well aware of the temptation; he regularly searched the men's dockey bag and of course the high-brimmed hat was too obviously a hiding place. But he could really only search two places – so there was a good chance would not inspect the old jug which had provided a welcome mouthful of cold tea – and frequently went home filled with corn.

However she got their food Ria made the most of it. She prepared her man's dinner in the traditional way: a blanket of plain dough was rolled out, a piece of fat salt pork was lapped up in it, together with a potato or perhaps a small apple and part of an onion; then the dumpling was boiled. John had this handed him on a plate for supper, but only so he could appreciate her skill. For she then brought out the knife and fork, cut the dumpling open and removed the piece of pork into a basin which she shut up for safety in the cupboard, leaving the dough, the potato, the onions, and all the abundant gravy on his plate.

Next morning John made his own breakfast at about five o'clock before setting off work at six. At ten o'clock he broke for his 'dockey' or 'thumb-bit' when he opened his satchel to find that piece of cold pork he'd glimpsed the night before which with a hunk of bread and an onion gave him the energy to carry on.

On his return at four o'clock he would expect to find his slippers in front of the peat fire into which he'd thrust his tired feet after removing the heavy fen-boots and unbuttoning his breeches at the knees. By then the new dumpling would be done to a turn. It was an unchanging ritual. Until the day something went wrong.

Ria was fond of a gossip and had become so engrossed in village scandal that she'd lost track of time entirely. John, finding no dinner ready, quietly took off his leather waist-strap, and, with no questions asked, gave her a sound threshing. Ria retaliated in 'tongue-banging,' and subsided into tears. The next morning the belt was missing, and a red cotton handkerchief had to take its place.

On his return at the end of a sad day John found the fire bright, a clean tablecloth, a cheerful forgiving wife, and an extra large dumpling smoking under his nose. The poor fare of yesterday had doubled his appetite so with no loss of time and watched all the time by little Ria, he gave one greedy slash of the knife. The dumpling came apart, and out rolled the missing belt, dry and destroyed. "Now" she said, "You gave me the strap yesterday, and I am giving it to you to-day, and hope you will like the taste of it". That was bad enough for the poor fellow, but nothing to what followed, when he heard how she'd informed the neighbourhood of her version of the proceedings.

The story of Ria's truimph over her belting husband had been trumpeted all around Wilburton; it was spoken of in the pubs, in the chapel – in fact everywhere except in church. And there was a good reason for that, as Elliott Smith explained.

Not a soul ever attended the service, except a few children with their devoted teacher. She, without any reward, with no ambition, her services unrecognised, week after week came, through all weathers, from an adjacent village, Bible and Prayer Book in hand, a very missionary to the village children.

Smith had been passing through the village one Sunday morning when the rain had started to fall in large, ominous spots. The long town street was empty, except for a few bearers of the Sunday dinner hastening with the dish to the baker's oven. But the church bell was clanging so he thought he'd break his journey and seek a blessing for his business. Entering he'd found the church completely empty and had resolved to let it stay that way, but just at that moment the clerk had dropped the bell rope, and coming out, been delighted to find a solitary lamb for his flock.

Given the choice of any seat in the church Smith had clambered into the old canopied manor pew. It was something like an omnibus off its wheels, raised two steps above the floor of the building, as indeed were the rest of the pews, all of them then as fragile as egg shells. From this vantage point he noticed that the tracery and mullions of the large windows were decaying and broken away; much of the glass was out, and where sufficient had gone to justify the work, panels of brickwork had been inserted. The fine oak screen, which once was canopied by a rood-loft, was whitewashed. The leaden roof leaked, and the walls were patched with green dampness. There were however some fine brasses which had attracted the attention of members of an ecclesiological society who'd decided they would be better relocated elsewhere. But one lady, amazed at seeing a carriage at the church door, had entered in and found two members of the society, tools in hand, in the very act of wrenching the brasses off the floor. So they still remained, though a little more battered than before.

The officiating clergyman, a curate's curate, non-resident and feeble-minded, had stammered so that he could not get through the Lord's Prayer without a struggle, and his recital of the service was nothing but a long attempt, ending in painful vocal gulps entirely unintelligible.

But Smith's praying was not in vain for the cleric had been invited to dine at the Beristead House and had no compunction about inviting his new communicant to come along with him. It was not an opportunity to be missed. As they strolled the curate pointed out the half-timbered Rectory Farm, the wood of which had apparently come from large ecclesiastical buildings that had formerly stood nearby, in which Henry VII had stayed for a week in distant days gone by.

There was the tithe barn to which at harvest time wagons would come loaded with the rector's share – one tenth of the parish produce. No harvest carting could start until the parson's shocks had been marked. But this was much resisted here as elsewhere. "In one fen parish", Smith confided, "I saw this done by sticking lusty dark docks full of seed on the topmost sheaves of the rectorial tribute. These all went into his barn, and so into his sample and sacks, and, what was even worse, where the tithe-owner sowed his own tithe seed, the glebe became fouled with dock-weeds beyond the possibility of eradication, for hoeing does not destroy this hardy, spike-rooted offender. To do that, every plant must be pulled up by hand and burnt. Even then, old labourers declare, their ashes will grow. It is a fact that in walking over some parishes you can tell when you are crossing glebe land by the abundance of docks, while in the next field hardly a score could be found."

Reverend Jones, the curate's curate of Wilburton had led Elliott Smith the auctioneer down the long village high street some sixty feet above the level of the surrounding fen. Despite being only a temporary occupant of the pulpit, the clergyman had tried to get to know some of his parishioners – even if they did not attend his church.

There were the usual tradesmen – William Hazel the butcher (chiefly known for excellent pork), Elijah Marshall the wheelwright, two bakers, William Wright the cobbler, a tailor, John Green the blacksmith and a couple of shopkeepers supplied the villagers' needs. Then there was the one village pub kept by Edward Markwell. This was a place Smith knew by repute as it was there that auctions were held. But these sales were unlike any of those at which he officiated.

For in this village land and cottages were sold by the 'pin-in-the-candle' method. A forthcoming sale was 'cried down street' to come off in the evening at the public-house where chairs and benches were placed round the best room, with jugs and mugs on the table. In the centre of the room was positioned a rushlight having a pin passed through its wick about two inches below the top. Once the light burnt down to this pin, the flame would be extinguished.

As night-time fell so people gathered and the jugs were filled to order while the vendor gave an oral abstract of his title and revealed its encumbrances, every one of which was perfectly well known to the whole company. He was bombarded with many questions with every defect and disadvantage made much of and many other ones suggested.

At last all was ready, the rushlight was lighted and the room became full of tobacco smoke while the jugs were filled, emptied, and again replenished. But not until the flame approached about an inch above the pin was the first bid was made, ridiculous in amount, and in a tone of indifference. Nobody took any notice, no one spoke, but all smoked vigorously. Eventually the flame got within a quarter of an inch of the pin and a voice doubled the first offer. This caused excitement and attention. Speculation became contagious, boots were nervously scraped on the floor & here and there a chair drawn forward.

The persistent flame was nearing its destroyer. Was the last bidder to acquire the estate? One, two, three advances in half-crowns were made; the atmosphere, though smoky, became nervous; eyes glittered as melted tallow bathed the pin. Then one more bid, and simultaneously the light disappeared. That was it; the sale was done. There were no other formalities. The deposit was paid and the mental strain of the last few seconds relieved by replenished jugs and beakers of brandy and water for the purchaser and vendor.

Smith noticed that many of the cottages had excellent fruit gardens at the back. The curate explained that a labourer paying fourteen pounds rent for house and garden would sell sixty pounds' worth of plums from it in a favourable year. They loaded two wagon loads of fruit a week which were sent by road all the way to Covent Garden. The staple produce was green gooseberries, black currants, and a variety of plum named the 'Wheatens' because its yield was gathered in harvest time. The gardens never required any manure and with the exception of black currants, their yield had not decreased over the past sixty years.

The village supported three flocks of sheep. The first belonging to the manor, the second to the rectory, while the third was an independent one, the rights of which could be bought and sold. Each flock had its shepherd – Goosey, Powers or Mitchell - who stalked ahead of his flock leading them down to the sheepwalks or 'green-ways' that ran between the still-open fields, his dog bringing up the rear and every now and again snapping at any ewe that ventured to snatch a bite from the corn. Nearby the commoners' cows, about twenty-two in number, were 'flitted' or tethered with rope and shackle. They were also stocked on Grunty Fen, an inter-parochial waste at all seasons of the year. But should any stranger attempt to turn his stock out on to the common land there would be problems and sometimes the

unfortunate animals would be ham-strung in punishment. When disputes arose they had to be settled – and that was done at the Beristead, towards which the curate was making

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The Wilburton curate had led Smith past the village blacksmith's shop – where the man ceased working and pretended not to notice the parson's passing - to the far end of the village high street . Here houses gave way to a high old red-brick wall, part of which formed the village pound from which the presence of pigs was perceptible through more than one of the senses.

The Rev Jones paused by the side of a giant oak tree – said to have been planted by one of the Henry's during his visit to the village, then turned down what appeared to be a private driveway towards a fine Elizabethan manor house on the left hand side

Elliott Smith's auctioneer's eye appraised the property. It stood in about three acres covered by buildings. There was a large square pigeon-house with a high-pitched tiled roof from which hundreds of doves darted in and out of the wooden cupola at its summit, swooping away in a flock to the open field for food. They were privileged birds, manorial robbers. No farmer dare kill or maim one despite the damage they caused to his crops.

Then there was the manor barn, thatched with reed. It was the largest in the neighbourhood, well able to hold the better part of the barley crop – which was always much better than that supplied to the rector. There were other barns as well but the main structure was the Beristead house itself with its two projecting ranges.

It had been built about 1610 for Sir John Jolles, who'd also owned Hinton Hall just over the hill at Haddenham. He'd been a draper and Deputy Governor of the Company of Merchant Adventurers who was elected Lord Mayor of City of London. But when he'd died without issue matters had all got very complicated with various legal wrangles to be sorted before it had been acquired by the current owners, the Pell family. But Sir Albert had died in 1832 and it was now administered by his widow the Hon. Lady Margaret Letitia Matilda Pell. Not that she was there very much. Indeed the curate had yet to make her acquaintance.

The south range had once been the family's area while the north contained the servants quarters. But now one wing was occupied by the manor steward, the other by the tenant of the Manor Farm

The curate knocked and was admitted, leaving Smith outside. He returned after a minute or two and motioned him to follow. But there was a disappointment; there was no Sunday lunch waiting for them. Instead they were led into a room at the centre of the building, which was dominated by the Royal arms of the time of Queen Elizabeth in embossed leather. It was magnificent in true heraldic colours and quarterings, with most the fantastical dragon as one of the supporters, and a lion as the other. This was a beast whose teeth and claws seemed to be pawing the shield, while his menacing head faced out as if he was snarling at the Armada of Spain. On one side was the red rose of York, on the other the white of Lancaster, the whole encased in a suitable frame of the period.

Here the manor courts leet and courts baron had been held for generations, here the jury was summoned to see the old customs observed. It was here that people came to register their claims to be admitted to a copyhold estate and pay the fixed fine, here that quit-rents were

paid or encroachments on the common ways reported with the bailiff and pinder present to resolve disputes. And today it was here they found the steward swamped by minute books and rolls of ancient parchment. He seemed to have resolved to ease something of his predicament for already the fire was roaring away with other yellowing papers ready to follow. But this would be a tragic mistake, Smith was quick to point out. For Cambridge bookbinders – like John Bowtell – were always seeking just such material to reback books before binding. And anyway what were they all about?

581

The table at the Wilburton Beristead was covered in old paper – very old paper indeed. Elliott Smith knew a little of ancient documents as he frequently had to handle them as part of his auctioneering practice, but he had seen nothing like these. Fortunately the Reverend Jones was something of an antiquarian and between them they concluded that these were manor court and account rolls which seemed to stretch from the reign of Edward I in the 1200s to Henry VII who had actually visited the village.

There were many references to bailiffs, reeves, cottars and works: apparently the serfs - nearly everybody - had to work on the lord's lands, ploughing, mowing, harrowing, carting dung, digging in the vineyards at Ely or catching rabbits, although the reaper, the blacksmith and the reeve were excused. The latter was the man who had to keep all the figures – the barn accounts, stock accounts and the rest. Individual names were mentioned – William Starling, John Walter, Aubin Willay, Edmund Prat, Richard Cokayne, John Crombred. It was a unique record and now was in danger of being burnt.

Smith had made the bailiff, Edward Kempton, the promise of a substantial payment if he could take them back to Cambridge with him. It was an offer that was willingly accepted – anything to get them out of the way so that he could concentrate on more urgent matters.

For the latest owner of the Manorial rights, Mr Albert Pell, a Judge in Bankruptcy had recently died leaving the property to his widow and two sons, the older of whom, named Albert after his dad, was expected to pay his first unaccompanied visit that very afternoon.

The three men had managed to clear the table before the sound of an approaching chaise was heard on the road outside. The coachman drew the vehicle to a halt outside the door as the maid made her way to greet the soon-to-be master. It was the matter of a few minutes, while outer clothes were removed and the needs of nature attended to, before they were each introduced to the young Albert Pell. He was a slight lad, of about sixteen years of age and like all travellers he was cold and thirsty. Smith noticed that he took his tea sweetened with sticky brown sugar and consumed quantities of hot buttered toast that he pronounced the best he had tasted.

Kempton explained the recipe – "Cook keeps a quantity of dry toast in readiness so that when required it can be dipped for a couple of seconds in a saucer of boiling water and put on a hot plate. Then she takes the butter which had been melted in a saucepan on the hob by the fire and applies it abundantly to the toast using her husband's old shaving-brush"

The lad was apparently none too healthy, suffering from severe attacks of inflammation of the lungs. It had not been helped by an outbreak of cholera at his school, Rugby, whose headmaster, Dr Arnold, had been a family friend. His arrival had made an impression on the lad: "My father took me there on the outside of coach on a cold April day in 1832. He wore a new invention of Mr Mackintosh, a waterproof coat. It smelt badly of dead poplar leaves, got stiff in frosty weather and frightened the horses as he mounted the coach side by the sharp cracking sound it emitted.

“Dr Arnold enrolled me on the school list but nobody told me what I should do next. So I just wandered into a class of the smallest boys I could see and sat down as far as I could from the master next to an overgrown boy who smelt of suet – apparently he was the son of a butcher. The master was excellent in just one regard – his use of the cane, and I gave him constant opportunities for practice. Nothing I could do would please him so I just gave up trying. Then one day Dr Arnold was horrified to notice my beaten hands. He moved me to the lower-fourth where the master did not believe in such punishment. But by then I was hardened and refused to do any work until, in desperation, he sent me into town for a cane. When he came to use it he was helpless and that made me laugh. But as I walked back to my seat every boy in the class kicked me on the ankles so hard that I decided to escape. I worked as much as I could until I was moved up to Bonamy Price’s form.”

582

Life at Dr Arnold’s Rugby School was dominated by smoking, drinking and reading. But it was not the standard Classics that had captivated the young Albert Pell, soon to be squire of Wilburton. As soon as he learned of Elliott Smith’s acquaintance with a University Librarian and bookbinder, his initial reserve faded.

For he had a particular book that he wanted to be bound in the finest leather; it was not one of any great antiquity – in fact it had only recently been published – but he had every part and was determined to keep them together.

He explained how a few years ago each of the Houses at Rugby had started their own library and amongst his favourite volumes were Bell's “Life in London" and "Sketches” by ‘Boz’. But soon everybody had been talking of another ‘Boz’ – something called "The Pickwick Papers”, which was being issued in monthly numbers.

“I remember that the first time I set eyes on it was through a small pane of glass in a bookseller's window in the Strand. I took a good look: it had illustrations on the outside of a green paper cover. The price was, just then, beyond my means, and I saw no more than the outside of the cover. There was a boy, however in our house at school, son of one of the sitting magistrates, to whom his father, as good fortune would have it, sent the current numbers of "Pickwick" fresh from the press. This was treasure-trove in which we resolved that all should be partners.

“There was a two-horse coach, the Pig and Whistle, which ran from Daventry, through Dunchurch, bringing on to Rugby passengers for who had come north by the four-horse coaches on the Holyhead Road, and it conveyed parcels as well. We worked out what day the new number of "Pickwick" would be on the road and what time the coach would arrive. Then we ran down to the coaching office to retrieve the precious parcel, before dashing back to our house and so into the hall.

“There we tore the issue up into sheets. The first page together with the illustration was handed to its lucky owner with the others kept in strict custody. As soon as the first page had been read it was passed on to a senior boy, who commenced his study of it, while the second page was passed to the original proprietor. Within twenty minutes quite a group of us boys were all devouring it piecemeal, in deep silence, broken every now and then by bursts of laughter.

“I was small, and it was a very long time before it was my turn, which sometimes did not come till a night had passed away. At last, however, the precious sheet was dealt out to me, and it was thus I first read my ‘Pickwick’ and I well remember with what regret I finished the

last lines of that immortal story". Once the death of his father had ensured his financial viability Albert had made a point of amassing a complete set of the issues.

When, sitting in the Little Rose, the actual Samuel Pickwick heard of this endorsement of his "Papers" a blush spread across his cheeks but his chest swelled with pride. His ego was however soon deflated

For, Smith continued, the lad's favourite character was Sam Weller, the coachmen. He'd had many opportunities to meet such men on the roads and in the inns he used on his journeys to and from school. He'd observed bits of Sam often: his hat, his gaiters, his inimitable striped sleeve waistcoat, his shiny hair and gay features, his impudence and his good temper, his wit and his proverbs; but it had been left to Boz to arrange all these distinctive characteristics into one fictional character. Nonsense – Sam Weller was as real as Sam Pickwick himself!

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Albert Pell was most knowledgeable about the proceedings of the Pickwick Club; he had fully acquainted himself with their adventures but shortly he hoped to embark on one for himself. For the main reason that he had journeyed from Rugby School was to present himself for interview for admission to Cambridge's grandest college, Trinity. It ought to be something of a formality for his late father had attended before him, and his new title and wealth should ensure that they'd welcome him with open arms. Nonetheless he was still nervous.

Here Elliott Smith was able to offer some guidance, for part of his trade was the supply of good-quality furniture to that college and he had often been entertained within the walls of the magnificent Master's Lodge itself, virtually a palace with an ornate staircases and fine furniture. It had been remodelled by one of Cambridge's most remarkable characters, Richard Bentley whose turbulent career had just been recorded in a biography by the Dean of Peterborough, James Monk.

At his appointment in 1700 Bentley was a Johnian Pig – the traditional nickname for somebody who'd graduated from the neighbouring college of St John's. But 'pig' was soon to be the mildest of insults that was to be bandied about the ancient courts. For he was a young man determined to shake up the moribund fellows of Trinity.

First he needed a suitable home – not for himself he was anxious to stress. For Trinity was a royal college, it was here that Monarchs and their judges stayed whilst visiting Cambridge, and they were shortly to welcome their future king, the young Duke of Gloucester. It would only cost £300 to transform the old Lodge and Bentley would pay a third of that himself. It would need new ceilings, new floors, new windows – and a double-vaulted wine cellar, a summer house beside the river - oh yes and a new staircase. Except that the new staircase itself cost £400 while the total bill came in at over £2,000.

Nor was it just for the benefit of visiting Royalty, it was to impress the new Mistress of Trinity. For the Master had fallen in love with Joanna Bernard, a beauty from Brampton who'd consented to become his bride. There was just one small problem: college statutes specifically banned any women from residing in Trinity, and once a master married then he had to stand down. But Bentley believed rules were there to be broken and obtained Royal permission to do as he wished. Anyway the bachelor dons would learn to love her too. Soon there was the pitter-patter of tiny feet and the ancient building echoed with the squeals and laughter of not one but three children. The Master preferred his family to his fellows, especially at meal times. So he ate with them on his own dining table, meaning he did not have to associate with the whining academics in the college dining hall alongside.

They had every reason to whine; Bentley cut expenditure on college feats, reduced their stipends (whilst increasing his own), and enforced attendance at chapel (something he stopped doing) – on which he spent a great deal of their money. He did away with the old rules about appointing Fellows – so what that it was set down in ancient Statutes. He got his son elected (before the lad had actually taken his degree), and arranged that the young man who was courting his niece should be appointed too – well his father had promised a very significant endowment when he married (except that he married somebody else).

But they'd moan about anything. They disagreed with him spending college money on building a grand new house for his family out at Over (the 'worst and most dirty and unhealthy part of the county'). They even complained about him bringing in wheat and barley that he'd received as tithes and selling them to the college at inflated prices.

Year after year the squabble between the Master and Fellows became more and more bitter till in the end the dons decided enough was enough. They drew up a list of complaints of his misdeeds and called for a proper enquiry. But who was to judge the Master of Trinity?

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All Cambridge academics had been fascinated when Trinity College washed their very dirty linen very publicly. But until he had read James Monk's biography of the Master, Richard Bentley even Elliott Smith had been unaware of quite the full extent of the scandal.

The college Fellows had built up a very strong case but Richard Bentley was not a man to give in easily. He contended that he had been appointed as Master by the King, if he had transgressed then it should only be the monarch who stood in judgement on him. The arguments dragged on for four years, a mixture of legal wrangling, college statutes and personal abuse. Finally in May 1714 the arrogant Master of Trinity was compelled to travel down to London to face the complaints of his Fellows in front of the Bishop of Ely, John Moore. By then many of the issues were well-known. For a 'Letter to the Bishop of Ely' had been published in which the writer dismissed the 'distempered frenzies of cloistered bigots'; who complained of the reforms that had been introduced, whereas what they were really worried about was a rise in the price of claret by a shilling a bottle. It did not actually contain the name the author but few doubted it was Bentley himself and it did his already doubtful cause no good at all.

Fifty-four charges were lodged against him, each was argued in the great hall of Ely House over a period of six turbulent weeks. Nor was the language always diplomatic, on one occasion Bentley was so severely criticised that he fainted from the shock. Then it was time to wait for the Bishop's judgement. When it came it was damning: he had found the Master unfit for his post and 'By this our definitive sentence, we remove Richard Bentley from the office of Master of Trinity".

But Richard Bentley was not thrown out. For during the heated discussions in the draughty hall the sixty-eight-year-old Bishop Moore had caught a severe chill. He died before he could give voice to his findings. Bentley breathed a sigh of relief, went back to Cambridge and carried on much as before. By now several of his most vitriolic enemies had passed away and the others had become so sick of the dispute they'd decided just to give up the battle

Now he got even more outrageous. In 1718 the Cambridge Regius Professor of Divinity died. It was the most valuable Chair in the University and Bentley decided that he would be the best replacement.

There were one or two problems. As Master of Trinity he was expressly prohibited from applying – indeed he was the person charged with admitting the successful candidate to the position. What's more should there be any dispute – like the one he had endured – then it was the Master of Trinity who would sit in judgement. He was also one of the people who had to make the appointment along with the Vice Chancellor, the Provost of Kings, the Masters of Clare and Christ's and two senior fellows from Trinity itself. And none of them believed that Bentley was in any way suitable.

However such small details did not stop him. By exercising his undoubted dubious powers to their fullest extent he first got the backing from the Chancellor of the University himself, then arranged for the Vice Chancellor to be out of town with the President of Queens' (one of his few supporters) standing in for him. Then he appointed two of his few Trinity acolytes to senior college positions, winning their support as a reward. This so exasperated the three other electors that they boycotted the proceedings. Then, when no other candidates presented themselves and with the Master of Trinity voting for himself, Richard Bentley emerged triumphant.

He now combined two of the most prestigious positions within the University of Cambridge – and two of the most lucrative. He was invincible, nobody dare oppose him

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Richard Bentley had, by hook or by crook, elevated himself to the most senior positions within the University of Cambridge. He was Master of Trinity College and Regius Professor of Divinity. Then in 1717 he had the opportunity to meet one of the few people who were his equal. King George I, who had been racing at Newmarket , had graciously accepted an invitation to visit Cambridge whilst he was in the area. He would of course be received in the Master's Lodge of Trinity College so sumptuously refurbished by Bentley.

The University Chancellor, the Duke of Somerset, felt it was his duty to be there to greet His Majesty, and various other Heads of Houses gathered at Trinity to welcome him. But Bentley was too busy to be bothered to accord such lesser mortals hospitality. So they had to hang around outside until the Duke arrived. He was met by the Vice Chancellor in the middle of the Great Court and conducted to the Lodge so that he could refresh himself after his journey. There they found Dr Bentley still in his bed-gown and slippers – but with enough self-assurance to greet his illustrious guest with the proper composure due to his exulted position.

Then while one divested himself of the dust of his travels, the other donned his finest gown and together they watched as the college clock ticked around to the hour at which their sovereign would be with them.

Even his enemies had to concede that Bentley had arranged things well. The Dining Hall was sumptuously fitted out and a grand banquet prepared to round off a memorable day during which the King was lauded in Latin at the Senate House (well at least his Majesty understood that language, even if his knowledge of the English tongue was distinctly lacking). The feast was enjoyed by all those who attended – but sadly it did not include the King. Bentley had waited at the Great Gate for his Royal visitor but the King had been escorted to the Queen's gate of the college which was locked up for security reasons. There he stood for several minutes admiring the filthy state of Trinity Lane ('Piss-pot Lane' in common parlance) whilst a flunkey rank round to the front to alert those inside. A fleet-footed porter dashed across the

court to open up the side gate while Bentley and his Fellows made their way as speedily as dignity allowed, only to find His Majesty already inside.

After such a humiliation there was no way the King would dine in public. So he took his food in the Master's Lodge – thus justifying all the money that had been expended on it – at least in Bentley's eyes. Nor was that the end of the fiasco. For at the Senate House the King had, as custom dictated, nominated a number of people as Doctors of Divinity but they had to be formally admitted to their posts by the Regius Professor. Tradition decreed that he would receive a small payment for this service. His predecessors had charged two guineas, but Bentley wanted four – and demanded the cash straight away. Some paid up but the others refused saying it was unwarranted, unreasonable and extortionate.

Not for the first time the courts of Trinity resounded with reports of the heated and most ungodly discussions that raged. Bentley was the King's professor and they were getting the degrees cheaply – they normally cost about £100. If they continued to argue then the price would go up to £10. He did offer a compromise: they could appeal and if he was found to be out of order then they could have their money back. Most accepted the deal, one man did not. He sued the Regius Professor in the Vice-Chancellor's court.

But Bentley had far better things to do than to obey their summons to appear, indeed he locked up the Esquire Bedell they sent to serve the warrant, saying – not the first time - that only a King could judge the Master of Trinity. Despite this they went ahead and once more the printers were busy issuing pamphlets supporting one side and the other. In the end he was found guilty of treating the University with contempt by a majority of more than two to one. Bentley was stripped of his doctorate, stripped of his Professorship and reduced to the status of an undergraduate. But he remained Master of Trinity.

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By 1718 Richard Bentley, Regius Professor of Divinity had been stripped of his University degrees and been reduced to the status of an undergraduate. He'd only retained his post as Master of Trinity College because the Bishop of Ely had died before he could give his judgement against him. A lesser man would have given up, not him. He did what academics do – he planned his next major work, a new version of the New Testament to be published by subscription. The words 'cabbage head', maggot, insect and worm are not normally associated with a Bible translator but they were being used in a pamphlet that, although unsigned, everybody knew to be written by Bentley himself.

They were directed against one of the Trinity's senior Professors, John Colbatch, who had dared to point out one small error in the new prospectus. Once more the dons were forced to air dirty linen publicly, threatening that proceedings would be brought against the author, if he could be found to be a member of Trinity College. Almost inevitably as the matter rumbled on it was Colbatch, the wronged party, who was to find himself accused of libel. Although he went into hiding to avoid a court case it was to no avail; he was found guilty, fined and sentenced to remain in prison until the money was paid. He would – people felt – have gotten away with a token fine had he not seen fit to correct the Judge's Latin. He didn't just do it once, he did it three times!

One of the main complaints against Bentley had been that he spent college money on enhancing his Master's Lodge. Now he restarted, not so much inside as out, adding a wine cellar, a summer house with a bath and converting the dovecote into a granary for the wheat and barley that was brought by barge from his rectory at Somersham. And while he was about it he landscaped the grounds at the back of the college, turning thirty acres of fenny pasture and unkempt grazing land into one of the glories of Cambridge, with gravelled walks and an

avenue of elm and lime trees. He also went back to law to claim back his degrees, rights and privileges from the University, although they delayed implementing the judgement until 28th March 1724 to ensure he could not be present to witness the laying of the foundation stone of King's College's new Gibb's building.

Then just to show that history repeats itself he once more played host when a King called in en route from Newmarket. This time it was George II and this time there were no embarrassing hiccups. His Majesty arrived in a dining Hall crammed with nobles, gentlemen and ranks of ladies in their finery. At the end there was a raised platform on which was a throne covered with blue cloth with a large oval table and a velvet chair over which was a canopy of purple, decorated with gold lace. Once the King was seated, a band of trumpets and drums struck up appropriate music whilst twelve young Gentlemen Commoners in their College gowns of purple silk and silver lace served a sumptuous banquet consisting of about 800 dishes including four dozen crabs, 52 lb of fresh salmon, thirty-six rabbits, 93 chickens and twelve geese. The King himself said it outdid both the Coronation Dinner and the City Feast – at least according to Bentley who stood beside his Majesty and acquainted him with his side of the various arguments. As was his wont, Bentley took the credit, Trinity paid the bill.

Then just to show that history repeats itself more than once the college council again complained about their Master's malpractices. There were more legal wrangles, more protracted disputes, more allegations and counter allegations until the verdict was pronounced. It was the same as last time, Bentley was to be deprived of his position.

This time there was no appeal, so Bentley just ignored it. He continued to live in his stately lodge surrounded by his grandchildren who created a racket, especially when playing battledore and shuttlecock. There the old man sat by the fire, partially paralysed, smoking his pipe, a glass of port at his elbow, his hat on his head and his Homer on his knees. He continued to write and he continued his lawsuits, claiming three-and-six pence as his expenses for visiting churches and parsonages in the Ely diocese – something he had never done in thirty-seven years. Inevitably he won his case. Then he died.

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Soon after Trinity College had finally lost its hateful head, Bentley, many of his long-standing enemies lost their hair – a tale that Elliott Smith was delighted to relate: "In those days the Senior Fellows of Trinity wore wigs. One man had seven that he wore in succession for seven days, flattering himself that nobody knew he had false hair. Each wig was a little longer than the one before and by the time he got to the seventh he would say 'I must get my hair cut tomorrow' – and switched back to the first one again.

"They had a barber's shop just within in the gate of the college where Fellows' wigs were powdered and dressed ready for Sunday services. Well an undergraduate bribed the barber one Saturday night to give them up; and then clambered up to the roof of the Wren library where he placed them on the heads of the four statues facing the hall. The next day the Seniors were in great confusion; with their best wigs missing they were obliged to wear their old ones. Then coming out of hall after dinner into Neville's Court and looking up, they saw them on the statues. The perpetrators were never found"

All this had endeared him to the young Albert Pell as they'd sat in Wilburton Burystead which prompted the young man to voice some of his concerns about his forthcoming interview for admission to Trinity. He'd heard of a fellow pupil, James Whitshed, who'd left Rugby with the reputation of being one of the best-trained classical scholars the school had

produced and gone up to Cambridge expecting to carry off as many of the University prizes as he elected to try for. He'd been quickly disillusioned. On his first morning he'd joined some four and twenty other freshmen seated at a triple row of desks for a lecture on Tacitus.

The lecturer was a pale, knock-kneed, narrow-chested young man, only some four years older than they were. His great classical attainments may have swung him up to the topmost branch of the Honours-Tree - so high indeed that he'd caught cold up among the clouds there and was never able to descend to earth again, or communicate his knowledge, in intelligible terms, to his fellow-mortals. He stuttered and stammered along while his audience sought out a vacant place on the forms and desks whereon to leave the record of their names or turned to their own classics – not Paley but Pickwick's papers. Others practised their impressions of the work of Cruickshank, producing a sketch of the Lecturer.

But then the tutor turned to them with an expression of mild-reproachfulness, yet entirely free from anger: "You are drawing a caricature of me. I ask you, is this fair? Just because I happen to be a few years your senior, and the college authorities have placed me in this position where, indeed, I earn my bread, is that any reason why I should be made the butt of your insults? I will never willingly gave you, or anyone in this room, a moment's pain". It left them all ashamed but Whitshed had felt from that time forward his career at Cambridge was doomed.

Even on his arrival the college had been full and he'd been installed in lodgings over a boot-maker's shop on King's Parade. The front room on the first floor was decorated with a gaudy paper bursting out into flowers and birds of an oriental hue and was looked after by a smart, middle-aged, matronly lady who'd ruled the house with despotic sway. His landlord was a man of such prodigious girth that it had been some years since he could admire the specimens of his workmanship that adorned his own feet. It was his custom when the labours of the day were done to stand at his shop door and smoke an evening pipe as he looked out on the world that passed along King's Parade. But undergraduates took great delight in lying in wait and darting suddenly out from the corner of St Edward's Passage to tap him with some violence in the stomach – which from its size completely protruded over the door-sill. He'd become so familiarised with this little local custom, handed down by tradition from one generation of students to another, that he actually took pleasure in their attacks, eluding them with a degree of dexterity hardly to be expected. Indeed it was only once or twice in a term that he had to confess to a 'palpable hit' which left him puffing and wheezing for a whole hour afterwards.

Elliott knew him well – William Swan, a godly man and a churchwarden. There were far worse places to have lodgings at the start of an academic career – at least Whitshed did not have to face the wiles of old Howson!

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Old Howson, was a porter of one of the colleges – Elliott Smith would not divulge which, nor reveal the true names of the individuals involved - for reasons that would later become obvious. He was a Peninsular and Waterloo man, who had been a private under Colonel Wellesley at the taking of Seringapatam. On the breaking out of peace he had returned to his native town of Cambridge, where his prowess in war had recommended him to the Master for the office which he at present held.

The notions of discipline and strict subordination which he had gathered in the camp were not destined to be thrown away in his new situation in the cloister. He was the deepest of all the deep files that the governing powers set to watch over the slippery movements and cunning

devices of the youngsters. One of the duties which devolved upon him was to close the great gate at ten o'clock every night, and after that hour to admit no strangers or let out no undergraduate belonging to the college.

Punctually each night as the clock struck ten, the huge, oaken, nail-studded door creaked on its hinges, and closed with a bang. A moment afterwards, you might have offered him the Universe to open it, the answer would be sure to have been "Gone Ten". No entreaty had ever wrung from him the respite of a single moment; no device, no disguise (and many had been tried) had been able to baffle his vigilance. As for a bribe, the idea of such a proceeding was preposterous.

But one night one of the undergraduates – let's call him Watson - was entertaining a group of friends from other colleges when Jack Mawbey wagered £20 that he could get out of the college after the gate had been closed for the night. The plan was quite simple: old Howson knew all the faces of 'his' men, but Jack would disguise himself using some of the wigs that had been borrowed from Richard Dimmock of Sussex Street, supplier of theatrical accessories, for an undergraduate performance. That ruse would not have worked except for one thing: he had a brother only slightly older than himself, the Reverend Charles Mawbey who was the incumbent of one of the Cambridge churches. By the time Jack had been properly made not even their mother could have told them apart.

Shortly after ten-thirty the lads put their plan into operation. One undergraduate from Caius went first and since he was a visitor he was allowed to leave with no trouble. Then before Howson had chance to settle down to his routine Jack and a Christ's man made their approach, earnestly discussing some theological issue. The porter issued his customary challenge: "Is the party applying for ingress or egress a member of this college?" before a smile of recognition came over his features. He trust the key into the lock, turned it, then paused before enquiring, in his most deferential tone, whether he had the honour of addressing the Reverend Charles Mawbey.

"Mawbey, yes my man, Reverend Charles – of Trinity", Jack replied in a voice so like his brother's that his father would not have been able to distinguish between them. "Have you anything to say to me". "Oh, nothing Sir," Howson continued, "only to ask what's to be done with this letter that you left today for your brother. I suppose that now you have seen him, you won't care to have it delivered"

"Oh, ah, yes my man, to be sure, you may as well give it back to me" – the words had scarcely passed Jack's lips when from the grin which overspread the hard, knotted features of Howson, he knew he'd been caught in a trap. The letter was merely a device of the enemy; a not particularly ingenious, but as it proved, a very effective means of testing his identity. A second glance at the porter's face showed that any hope of fooling him has been vanquished. All three burst into loud fits of laughter – the Christ's man was still chortling when he neared his own college – only to realise that he was now too late to be granted admission there!

Meanwhile Mawbey returned to his friend's rooms – "I'll do you yet, Howson", he cried as he made his way across the court. "Take you all your time; take you all your time Sir" came the reply as the porter re-locked the gate and put the keys in his pocket.

But this night Howson's security would be beaten.

The failure of Jack Mawbey's strategy to fool Old Howson, the porter, into letting him out of college after the gates had closed at ten caused great merriment when he returned to his friend Watson's room.

But he was determined not to lose his wager – there was more than one way to escape from such an ivory tower. Now Jack had a nickname, 'The Magpie', from his manner of strutting and his inveterate habit of chattering. He was little more than five feet in height but he tossed about his little head and comical features with as much self importance as though they had been supported on the frame of a life guardsman. His body though so exceedingly small was compactly and even strongly put together and he excelled in all kinds of gymnastic exercises and feats of agility.

He'd attracted great applause when he'd clambered to the top of the Master's kitchen chimney after a chimneysweep boy became wedged in the flue and his master, a reprobate character called Chumley, had been too drunk to pour a bucket of water down it to flush the lad out.

If he couldn't get the college doors opened for him he would find no difficulty with the windows – but the windows were barred to prevent entry or exit. Except for those in the garret room that Watson occupied which were at least sixty feet from the ground. Had any other member of the college proposed such a thing he would have been restrained by force but little Mawbey had the power to accomplish any gymnastic feat so his friends left him to do as he chose. He threw off his college gown, tottered to the bedroom and thrust first his legs and then his whole body out of the window. For a moment he hung feeling with his feet for a ledge about a yard below the windowsill and as soon as he had obtained a foot hold shifted his two hands till they grasped a leaden water pipe which ran up the building in this direction. By the aid of this pipe and other ledges and protuberances he managed to make his way safely to the ground and a gentle 'All right' from the bottom served to convince those above that he was standing with a whole skin and no broken bones in the lane.

The party returned to the sitting room to celebrate the exploit in more rum punch before leaving Mawbey outside to fend for himself until Howson opened the gates next morning. At breakfast the friends were reunited – all bar one. Of Watson there was no sign.

As they emerged for the ten o'clock lecture it was obvious that something unusual had taken place. Knots of Undergraduates, some of them but half dressed, were standing out on the grass plats talking earnestly together. Bedmakers and gyps were running to and fro with faces that bore the imprint of some extraordinary news. It did not take long to discover the cause of all this hubbub. Poor Watson had been discovered lying quite dead in the lane at the foot of his bedroom window his head shockingly crushed. The body had first been seen by one of the Fellows who lodged in a room on the first floor. As he drew up his blind to dress at about eight o'clock in the morning the ghastly object presented itself to his view. He at once ran out and apprised Howson and together they hurried out into the lane, bringing back with them the corpse of the unfortunate young man which they laid on the table of the porter's lodge.

It was then that undergraduates saw another side of Old Howson, for at the sight of the dead young man tears were streaming from his eyes - eyes that had looked with composure on the thousands mowed down by the cannon of Salamanca or perishing in the trenches of Badajoz. There was of course an inquest in an attempt to learn when the deceased had last been seen alive. But here Howson's commitment to his college became clear and no details of the wager or Mawbey's earlier descent came to light. The Jury returned a verdict of Found Dead but no report ever appeared in the Cambridge Chronicle and University Journal – whose Editor suddenly became a regular participant at college feasts.

The Jackdaw was quietly sent down and the other participators in the events of the evening were rusticated for three terms, again without comment.

It would all have been hushed up had not Elliott Smith been chatting with an ironmonger friend, Robert Headley, who had been called in to ensure that extra-thick bars were installed at every window – especially those in the attic rooms.

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Porters, Pickwick pondered, must be in a particularly privileged position within a college. They were dealing daily with men of learning and boys of wealth – for surely only people such as these could afford a Cambridge education. But there were exceptions, as Elliott Smith explained. Some time ago Jabez Bannister, a Gyp – a 'gentleman's gentleman' of one of the colleges (he'd not name which) had married Maltida Gunson, the daughter of a college cook, who worked as a bedder. Between them their families had served the college for generations.

Jabez and Matilda produced a son who they named Barnabas. From a very early age he was employed in cleaning shoes when he attracted the attention of the late Rev Charles Simeon of King's who, with his usual benevolence, procured the boy admission into a free grammar school. His progress there was sufficient to warrant the highest anticipations of his success at university provided the requisite means for entering him as a sizar could be procured. Now his parents had managed to save about one hundred pounds to fall back upon in case of sickness or inability to work. But they resolved to stake the whole of this little capital upon the success of their only child and with this, together with an exhibition of twenty pounds which he had brought away from school, was sufficient to carry him through one year at college. After that they decided to leave things to providence.

With these very slender expectations - and after reminders from his father about certain youthful indiscretions that a then eminent Fellow who combined the office of Vice Master, Bursar, Tutor and Professor of Civil Law wished not to be known - young Bannister was entered at the college in which his parents served. He was allocated a garret room on the fourth floor of a lichen-tinted building in the oldest court where he shivered through the winter months, despite the odd lumps of coal 'liberated' by his parents from the rooms of more wealthy undergraduates on the staircase.

It caused outroar amongst the undergraduates: what was the world coming to next. They tormented the father: "I suppose that you will no longer condescend to brush my clothes Jabez, now that you are the proud parent of a distinguished Academician" and the mother was the object of many a sportive shaft dipped in venom. For the first week or so of the term the appearance of the young man himself was looked for with great curiosity – some called out 'Boots' after him. Any chance that he would ever be accepted seemed doomed as he was tormented mercilessly. The best way to avoid their company was to work in the college library. This he did till two or three in the morning, only breaking off to put some little colour into his pale cheek and glassy eyes by escaping through the side gate into the lane alongside and the open fields beyond. But by accepting his position without a murmur and patiently devoting himself to study Barnabas began to bring a reaction in his favour. His superior knowledge which he always modestly displayed in the lecture room produced a feeling of respect; it began to be voted a shame to sneer at young Bannister and one or two of the leading undergraduates of the college actually set the example of inviting him to their rooms. When he accepted these invitations - which was not often the case - his demeanour increased the favourable impression already entertained of him. His peers began to feel a degree of pride in his success, even speculating on the chance of his winning for the College the distinction of a senior Wranglership. By the end of his freshman's year the Gyp's son had become one of the most popular men in the Hall.

But the family's small fortune had now completely disappeared and they seriously agonised whether his name could any longer be permitted to remain on the college books. His hard work had been rewarded with a scholarship worth five shillings and threepence a week together with the position of chapel clerk and librarian that brought in another sixty pounds, but it was still not enough. For the want of a sum of money lost at cards in one evening in the rooms of Fellow Commoners like Newdegate or Crossingham his academic career seemed doomed

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Barnabas Bannister, undergraduate son of a college gyp and bedder, found it very hard to make ends meet. He tried to eke out a subsistence by taking pupils: three or four hours devoted daily to the instruction of others might bring in cash, although it made a sad inroad upon the time available for his own studies. But he was in competition with numbers of other tutors already offering such instruction, men like Charles Darnay, a freelance language teacher specialising in French, who had something more of a rakish personality and hint of mystery about him.

As news of Barnabas' financial predicament leaked out - the old gyp, his father, was apt to be communicative on such matters - several of his fellow students who not a twelvemonth before had sneered at poor Boots suddenly realised that they were singularly deficient in classical and mathematical knowledge. They accordingly hastened to enrol themselves as his pupils, paying their fees in advance, though they never actually found the time to attend - of course they had never meant to do so. When he realised their ploy Barnabas returned their money in a manner which admitted of no refusal. This threw a damper on their zeal. They were quite prepared to contribute seven pounds a term towards his support but to devote an hour every other day to the study of classics and mathematics under his eyes - this was felt to be a sacrifice which even friendship could scarcely require.

So they devised other ways of aiding him indirectly. The truth suddenly flashed upon the whole college that his father, Jabez the gyp, was indeed a most valuable chap – and a very ill paid chap at that. The old man was surprised when on hurrying up to rooms - where he was usually received with a flying hair brush or boot - he found himself called upon to accept a sovereign or in some cases a five pound note as a slight extra reward for his valuable services.

His wife Matilda also noticed that the students were ordering even more food than previously, yet consuming even less than before. It was her job to clear it away, and her perk that she could take it to feed her son in the attic room above. Suddenly too her charges seemed to be anxious to keep up with the very latest fashion and discarding fragments of their wardrobe such as hardly-used coats and trousers, which she was desired to take out of the way. Strangely they always seemed to be just the same size as those Barnabas wore.

He too was finding his fortunes changing, recruiting three or four pupils tolerably regular in their attendance whose payments he could accept with a pure conscience. These, together with further contributions from Mr Simeon and one or two other good men allowed him to continue on the books of the college till the end of his second year.

But the pressure was proving too intense. His cheek grew very pale and his appearance altogether very care worn and anxious. The light in his sitting room continued to burn long after the idlest and most dissolute members of his staircase had hiccupped off to bed. He was burning his - secondhand - candles at both ends and fell into a chronic state of feebleness that left him scarcely a hope of being able to resume his studies. The Doctors shook their heads when he talked of returning to his book work: he was to try the air of the Isle of Wight and take a complete break with frequent exercise if he was to regain his health.

But there was no money for such excesses. Instead he left his college rooms to take a humble apartment in the neighbourhood of Midsummer Common. Undergraduates on their way to the boats would catch sight now and then of his sickly face looking out of a window on the ground floor and declared that there seemed little chance to judge from his appearance of his life being prolonged another six months. ‘Done up’, ‘Checkmated’, ‘Pumped out’ - such were the expressive terms used to denote his condition. Poor old Jabez and his wife went sorrowfully and perhaps somewhat negligently about their work: all their hopes were broken up and scattered to the winds.
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For nearly twelve months Barnabas Bannister had been at death’s door. At first he was sustained by the supplies of half-consumed food from his fellow undergraduates which his mother, the bedder, was encouraged to salvage. But this dried up once term came to an end. Nor did it restart once the new academic year had commenced, for his friends had left to pursue their careers in army, church or medicine and the plight of the son of the man and woman who tended to their every need was of less concern to the new arrivals.

Then amazingly Barnabas started to regain his strength until he was able to take his place once more in the old garret room. He studied extra hard as the time for going into the Senate House was at hand only to find that after two days spent in the examination he was taken with a fainting fit. The two following weeks were passed in bed and when he rose ill in body and far more ill in spirit it was too late.

When the lists came out he appeared at the bottom with what is called an Egrotat degree - like a horse that has broken down in the race he was not placed. Without a good degree a college Fellowship was impossible: they were bestowed solely with reference to the place obtained by each candidate on the List of Honors. A senior Wrangler would be admitted on the first vacancy, a fourth would be preferred to a tenth wrangler and so on in proportion. In such a system Barnabas’ chance was absolutely less than that of the last Junior Optime.

But Fortune at last smiled on him. No less than three old Fellows, who had spent the whole of their lives in the college, passed into another world - a better world said the funeral sermons but what could be better than a life of good living and little mental labour in academic seclusion? Two of their places were immediately filled up - in the one case by a twelfth wrangler in the other by a first class man in Classics. But the third vacancy caused a good deal of embarrassment - indeed the other dons were inclined to be seriously angry with their deceased companion for not having postponed his demise for a few months!

The fact was that there was no candidate with a higher degree than that of Senior Optime and it would be a disgrace to the college to admit a scholar of such moderate pretensions. A few of the Junior Fellows imbued with liberal notions cast their eyes upon poor Barnabas Bannister. They learnt from one of the Examiners for Honors that his papers during the two days that he had appeared in the Senate House showed clearly that his place would have been somewhere very near the top of the list if illness had not overtaken him. So they hatched a plot and by lulling the Senior dons into abstaining it was contrived that the Gyp's Son received more votes than any other and was therefore duly declared a Fellow of the College. By this stroke of good fortune his struggles were put an end to: financial security and a position in the world were secured to him.

It was not all plain sailing: the same system of petty annoyance which he had encountered in his early student days came to be put in practice against him on his elevation into the higher walks of academical life. It was not indeed until the Reverend Mr Bannister's lectures as sub tutor had become celebrated all over the University and till his work on the Differential Calculus had been quoted with approbation by the first German and French writers that they became fully reconciled to him.

By then his parents who had grown old in the service of the college had passed away in one of the outbreaks of disease that swept through Cambridge. Their funerals had taken place in a college chapel that had been filled with some of the most distinguished men in the country, men whose achievements would not have been possible except by the support they had received in their early undergraduate days from their gyp and bedder. But of course it was not something to be entered into the annals of the college, just one of those incidents that would be forgotten – indeed it was in everybody's interests to do so. [LEWIS. Our college]
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Elliott Smith recalled that as the conversation had flagged in the great hall of the old Burystead house at Wilburton, nobody seemed keen to leave its hospitable fireside.

It had been the prospective undergraduate, Pell, who'd broken the silence by enquiring about the prospects of a career in the church. The Wilburton curate was not encouraging: many of the livings were held by University dons who left the work to underpaid curates like himself. But there was some chance of making their way in the world; in his youth he had been inspired by the Reverend Thomas Robinson, a famous minister in Leicester.

Robinson had been an undergraduate of Trinity College where he'd taken Holy Orders as soon as his age would allow him. He distinguished himself in his examination and, having his eye on a fellowship, had decided not to move far from Cambridge. So he'd accepted the curacies of Witcham and Witchford, the salaries of which were very small.

Immediately upon his arrival in the fens he'd excited great attention by his exertions both within his own parishes and also within a circuit of several miles. He'd laboured diligently, preaching twice each Sunday in a voice which, though not perfectly musical like a trumpet, spread an alarm through all the region round about. Soon his churches were filled so that they were had to supplement their pews by setting forms in the aisles.

He came to Witcham in February and by April there were twenty or thirty people walking over from Mepal each Sunday, including two sisters, one of whom became his wife. He even won over the blacksmith's wife who had started by despising his youth but soon found him fully competent to promote her edification. Once she believed then her whole household also became regular attenders.

But some complained of his youthful appearance and others said he would go anywhere for a cup of tea. Indeed he took to visiting all his congregation. On one occasion being driven by bad weather into an odd house near the village of Coveney he found a poor woman who confessed that she had for some time been contemplating suicide. But before he left she was diverted from her purpose, embraced new views and principles and became an eminent Christian.

Others told of an old man nearly eighty years of age who had never been known to frequent a place of worship. He was a drunkard, a blasphemer, a proverb of profaneness but was brought to become a hearer at his church. His habits, his language and entire demeanour changed – he became a sincere penitent. His character had been so notorious that his case excited much notice.

Soon the curate of Witcham himself became the subject of much public conversation. He was discussed in the Combination Rooms at Cambridge and the Chapter house at Ely. While his Cambridge friends were tempted to ride over to Witcham that they might witness and profit by his preaching his enemies at Ely spread rumours that he was turning Methodist - and the increase of the Methodists was an alarming thing. Then some of the older members of the

congregation complained that the curate didn't like to have hymns – he felt that his services were complete without any singing at all.

Matters came to a head when Robinson returned home to attend his father's funeral. In his absence some parishioners voiced their concerns and found a ready supporter in the person of the Rev Lewis Jones the vicar of Witchford - whose church Mr Robinson served with Witcham. It soon became apparent that the tide had turned against him and he could at most only retain one of his churches, Witcham, and possibly not that. So after two years he sought a new living.

His departure caused a general lamentation. The people said they had never before been favoured with so eminent a minister nor did they expect to see his like again. To this day he is remembered with much gratitude and respect. His approvers reverie him as their best friend and their spiritual father while even his adversaries acknowledge that there had been a prophet amongst them.

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The Wilburton curate was despondent about every getting a living of his own, but he could always buy one – as Elliott Smith related.

In February 1824 the Times had carried an advertisement for an excellent rectory with gardens and all necessary buildings adapted for the accommodation of a family of respectability. The parsonage house was described as a handsome edifice in excellent repair, with gardens, shrubberies, farmyard and excellent outbuildings. It came with the benefit of tithes from 7,000 acres of good productive land, including the glebe valued at £2,000 per annum. The roads were excellent, with a turnpike passing through the village and the country abounded with game. The only problem was that it was in Hilgay, out beyond Littleport – a parish which had been rocked by scandal just a few years earlier.

In 1815 Hilgay the Rev J. Royle, aged 54, had been both incumbent and patron – he could decide who was to be rector. He'd advertised in The Times to say the perpetual avowson – the right to appoint the incumbent - was to be sold. A Dr Samuel Locke applied and was told that it would cost him £12,600. That seemed a high price, but Dr Locke paid willingly.

Soon afterwards the Rev Royle resigned his Hilgay living and found another position as incumbent of Compton Martin in Somersetshire. Its own minister had vacated the post a few days earlier – his name was Samuel Locke. Perhaps that was just a coincidence but as there was now a vacancy at Hilgay Dr Locke nominated himself to fill it.

Once he was installed Dr Locke sold the right to appoint his successor to a Mr Cradock for £25,000 – almost twice what he'd paid four months earlier. And if Cradock didn't pay before 9th August he was to forfeit £20,000 in damages, over and above the purchase money.

Of course Dr Locke was still Hilgay's rector, and could remain so for the rest of his days. But oddly the very day the transaction was completed he suddenly found that his health rapidly deteriorated. He – accompanied by the Rev Cradock - was obliged to travel post-haste to the Bishop of Norwich with a letter from his physician claiming he suffered from a liver complaint which had returned and so he must move away. But rather than appoint a curate to the living – as most would have done – Dr Locke had decided to give it up. So on 10th June 1816, Mr Cradock nominated himself as Rector.

It was not the end of the affair. The very next day Rev Cradock was made bankrupt and was unable to pay the sum agreed. So the Rev Locke took him to court over the £25,000, together

with the extra £20,000 in damages. To save himself from prosecution Cradock resigned the living. He was pleased to be out of it – despite the auctioneer's claims the house was much out of repair and Hilgay was an unhealthy place. Even his housekeeper told him, if he valued his wife, not to bring her here. It was so bad that he'd been obliged to drink a good deal of Madeira to keep himself well.

Meanwhile Dr Locke - whose health had miraculously suddenly improved - presented himself back to the living. He then tried to sell it again, this time to a Dr Lens. That's when the Bishop of Norwich realised something serious was happening and started legal proceedings to get Locke turned out. When it came to court, John Hollis, a solicitor, testified that he'd been employed by Dr Locke to sell the living to Cradock with the promise to give him very early possession. It also transpired that the two clerics were old friends. They were also in the same boat financially – both were badly in debt. In fact Samuel Locke was in notoriously difficult financial circumstances with judgements against him amounting to nearly £40,000.

But it was not the last to be heard of the Rev Locke. In 1810 he'd married a widow, Mrs Sarah Clinch, a lady of considerable property. She seemed even then to sense that things were not what they seemed for before the ceremony there was an agreement that most of her fortune would be kept separate from him. Then in 1819 she secretly wrote a will leaving her estate to her family – she'd not wanted him to know fearing cruel treatment if he found out. However she must have changed her mind on her deathbed for the footman and maid-servant told how they're been called to her room. Dr Locke had got up from wife's side bearing a new will to which she'd already added her cross – and insisted they witnessed that they'd seen her do it. She had been delirious – due to the large quantities of laudanum she took - and died later that day.

Well the family challenged the final will, telling how the Reverend had obtained money from her, not by her voluntary consent, but by the harsh exercise of his marital authority. The judge believed them and overturned the will, condemning Dr Locke in the courts in the same way he'd been condemned by the church

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It was not just the vicars that were engaged in financial wrangles, the Wilburton curate explained – the Bishops were at it too.

Some years earlier the Government had appointed Commissioners to inquire into the revenues and incomes of the Established Church. They had laboured hard to discover that while the average income for a curate was £30, a vicar might expect £304 and a Bishop about £6,000. They'd then come up with a scheme under which the richer Bishoprics would support the poorer ones and recommended that the Bishop of Ely should have average annual income of £5,500 – something that seemed reasonable to sustain his position. However since they calculated the value of the See as being £9,5000 they'd ordered him to pay over £4,000 each year to their funds.

This had enraged the present Bishop, Dr Joseph Allen – it was something he could never consent to. He was the best judge of the actual state of the See of Ely and such payments would be ruinous. Since his appointment following the death of Bishop Sparke a couple of years earlier he had not received anything at all and was living on money borrowed from his banker. Even if all the payments due to him as Bishop of Ely up to Christmas next were made it would not amount to £1,000. It would be some years before he even started to approach the average income deemed necessary for him to fulfil his role – did they really expect him to borrow from the bank to pay them £4,000 from his own savings!

Even in Bishop Sparke's time the annual income of the See of Ely had not been more than £8,000, he claimed – and that was at a period when land was fetching a good rent. Now land that had fetched £2,000 a year was only bringing in £1,345. The Commissioners were basing the income on the average over the previous 21 years. But that had seen seven particularly good years, followed by seven average years – inevitably there must be seven bad years to follow. Surely it would be better to allow the Bishop a guaranteed income of £5,500 and then pay over any surplus above that, whatever it should be.

But the Commissioners refused to budge, claiming their hands were tied. There the matter still rested. But the details of the financial squabbling had been published and were there for every canon or curate to gossip over.

Several clergy claimed their new Bishop had not gained his exalted position by great religious fervour – it was not so much a case of what he knew, but of who he knew. He'd attended Trinity College where he duly obtained a Fellowship, but he did not stay long in academic study. For he'd become tutor to John Charles Spencer, Viscount Althorp, a sensitive lad then experiencing a difficult home life. He'd guided him through the trauma of University and secured his own fortune. For, as a reward, the Earl Spencer had exerted his influence: the Rev Joseph Allen had been appointed to a vicarage in Battersea and a prebendal stall in Westminster Abbey. This gave him an income of £1,500 a year, a residence in the heart of the metropolis and membership of the eminent corporation of the Dean and Chapter of Westminster. It also made him well placed to gain another living, that of St Brides in the city of London and another salary which brought his earnings to over £2,000 annually. For several years his fortune had increased, but then politics took a hand.

The Whig party found themselves in power; his former pupil was now a leading member of the new Administration and did not forget his old tutor. Soon Dr Allen was Bishop of Bristol with a seat in the House of Lords, and yet more income. Now had come his move to Ely, previously one of the best remunerated in the kingdom – though now he was having to struggle to maintain what he considered a reasonable standard of living. Some thought it ironic that in his earlier days the new Bishop had actually been one of the Commissioners that had poked and pried into others' incomes!

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Finally talking his leave of the hospitable company at the Burystead, Wilburton, Elliott Smith had continued his journey back to Cambridge. Rather than pay the tolls on the turnpike road via Chittering, he chose the old route back through the fen. At first it was a steep climb to the top of Wilburton hill from where he admired the view stretching south beyond Cottenham to Cambridge. It was from this vantage point, he mused, that Hereward the Wake would have kept watch for the massed armies of William the Conqueror as they prepared to assault his island fortress in the years following the Battle of Hastings.

The story of that assault had been recently published by James Storer in his 'Antiquarian Itinerary' .It told how several English lords including Edwin, earl of Chester, Morcar, earl of Northumberland and Hereward, son of Leofric, lord of Brunne in Lincolnshire had sought refuge on the Isle of Ely. Hereward was elected general to defend the isle from the expected attack of the Normans, who besieged it in 1069.

William commanded the assailants in person and attempted to force a passage on the western side, by forming a causeway of straw, wood and bags of earth. But the work was obstructed by Hereward in several successful sallies. The king was obliged to raise the siege following disturbances in the north of England but returned in the spring of the year 1070. This time he'd encamped in a spot called 'Belsars Hills' opposite Aldreth, where a neck of firm land stretching into the fen, rendered the passage into the isle narrower than in any other part. At

this point Elliott Smith had begun to doubt Storer's account: he knew from his own travels that there were other places where the route across to the island of Ely was far narrower. One was the ridge at Stuntney while some of the farmers with whom he'd had dealings had reported finding what appeared to be a line of posts stretched across their land from Barway towards Little Thetford.

But Storer claimed to have discovered a manuscript in the British Museum which recorded: "We endured the violent threats of the Normans seven years together, untyll such tyme as Bellasyus, general of the Kyng's army, of whom certain Hylls, which at the south end of Aldreth Causey were built for the safety of the Armeys, took their names". In his version William formed a dam across the Old West River, only to have it destroyed during a flood. He'd then retired to Brandon for a council of war when it was resolved to renew the attack from the same point. Hereward had attended that meeting in disguise and, acting on what he'd heard, made his way to Aldreth disguised as a fisherman where he set fire to the magazines of straw and timber that William's troops had collected. Then taking advantage of the confusion he made a successful sally with his boats and destroyed the forts which the Normans had erected.

William, inflamed with resentment, proceeded to Cambridge where he alienated all the monastery's estates and gave them to his Norman followers: this was the surest mode of exerting the submission of the monks. But as the English officers fed at their tables, with their arms in constant readiness for use, they dared not offer to make terms with the king till they were virtually starving. Even then their by now unwelcome guests could not be prevailed on to agree. So the abbot, with several of his monks, left Ely privately and went to William at Warwick, where he implored his pardon and informed the king of the best measures for reducing the isle. They returned to Ely and waited.

During the next few months Hereward's men received reinforcements from their friends in Scotland and the north of England, forcing William into action. He marched a large army to re-commence the siege, then gave orders for the completion of the causeway. This took several months of hard labour before it was perfected and strengthened by forts and military engines. The soldiers were ordered to proceed but soon found their march impeded by some deep waters which lay between them and the firm land. They were obliged to drag a number of boats through the fens in order to make a floating bridge before they could continue their progress. The exertions of the besieged increased and they disputed the passage with much firmness, but the superior skills of the Norman soldiers in the use of their military engines overpowered resistance and victory was declared for the king. Great numbers of the English were slain in the battle and many of those who were made prisoners were cruelly mutilated. Some had their eyes put our, and others their hands and feet cut off so they might remain as living monuments of the Conqueror's vengeance and become a terror to such as presumed to dispute his authority. William had then decided to ensure that never again would the Isle of Ely become a haven for outlaws. He failed.

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Once Hereward the Wake had been finally vanquished, William the Conqueror had set out to ensure the Island of Ely would never again be a thorn in the flesh of other rulers. But within a few decades the country was engaged in a civil war to resolve who should be monarch – Stephen, his grandson or Matilda, daughter of King Henry I

Nigel, Bishop of Ely, supported the lady and repaired William's fort at Aldreth where he placed a garrison to defend the island against the king. Again the small settlement was in the front line. Stephen, having sent an army to besiege the Isle without success, came himself with a fleet of small vessels and having made a temporary bridge for his cavalry, forced his

entrance. Having put his enemies to flight he returned the Bishop's knights to Ely with their legs tied under their horses. Nigel was not there to see them – he'd fled to join Matilda at Gloucester. Stephen then garrisoned Aldreth camp with some of his own forces

But two years later the area was still in a state of revolt. This time the king sent a couple of his supporters, Geoffrey de Mandeville, Earl of Essex, and Gilbert, Earl of Clare, to arrest any of the bishop's men as they should find in arms. But by now the Bishop had returned and again taken possession of Aldreth castle. Then, while the Bishop was in Rome, his supporters learned that the king's men were planning an attack. They knew they did not have sufficient forces to defend the Island, so they sought assistance from an old enemy, Geoffrey de Mandeville - who had by then switched sides. They committed the castles of Ely and Aldreth to his care. It was an unwise move for Geoffrey, who had been imprisoned by King Stephen, now took his opportunity to gain revenge. He plundered Royal lands wherever he could in a reign of terror which saw him sack Ramsey abbey before moving across Cambridgeshire to Fordham where he raised a strong garrison of horse.

Meanwhile Stephen could do little but vent his frustrations by laying waste to the Bishop's property outside the Isle. It all lead to devastation, famine and pestilence until during an attack on a newly-constructed castle at Burwell Sir Geoffrey was nicked in the ear by an arrow. At first it seemed he'd had a lucky escape – an inch or two more and there would have been another fighter with an arrow in the eye – but the wound turned septic and he died.

Peace returned and the inhabitants of Aldreth found themselves once more trying to rebuild their lives without fear of gangs of armed men terrorising their area. It was not to last.

In 1216, during the war between King John and the Barons, a party of noblemen plundered the monasteries, carrying away the monks and extorting great sums for their release. Then another group entered the island at Stuntney, spreading devastation and robbing the churches of anything that had been missed by the previous pillagers. They entered the cathedral of Ely with drawn swords, threatening to burn it to the ground unless a ransom was paid. Many were taken prisoner but most of the richer inhabitants fled to London. Aldreth must have been resounded to the thundering hooves of their galloping horses, the escape made easier as severe cold had frozen the semi-liquid fen.

Meanwhile other barons headed with their cavalry into Cambridgeshire. They captured Cambridge castle, took possession of the Isle of Ely and prepared for siege. John duly raised an army and attacked; this time he found the weather was on his side: his men could pass easily over the still-frozen ground and the rebels melted away. But the elements were not also so kind: he later lost his baggage train attempting to cross the treacherous marshes of the wash

During the reign of Henry III the Isle again became one of the chief scenes of civil discord. In 1266 John Dayville with other rebellious barons having laid waste to Cambridgeshire and Huntingdonshire took possession of Ely. The Bishop, who had undertaken to keep the Isle for the King, was forced to flee with the news to court, where he met with a cool reception for having so ill defended his post. Once more the Wilburton hills were manned by lookouts while the barons fortified every approach and prepared for the attack they knew must come.

In the month of February following, the king himself came to Cambridge, where he commanded gates to be erected, and a ditch to be dug round the town, with all possible expedition. There he was joined by Prince Edward who brought with him an army of 30,000 men from Scotland. This time they sought the advice of local peasantry, who were by now well-versed in such matters. Under their guidance a fleet of barges were brought together and the army crossed by bridges of boards and hurdles. The barons attempted no further resistance, some sought their safety by flight, the remainder capitulated. Amongst them was a

Wake, a descendant of the brave Hereward who'd fought over that same ground 200 years earlier

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As he descended the steep drop from Haddenham, Smith passed two windmills, one either side of the road, both lazily at work in the intermittent breeze. Two mills in one spot were never a recipe for success – there was never enough wind to keep them both going.

He refreshed himself with a mouthful of clear water from St Ethedreda's well beside the road as he looked down on Aldreth. It was not much of a place, yet at one time it had been the site of a great market for fat cattle. That sale had decayed due to the problems of maintaining the causeway and the bridge across the Old West and beyond to Rampton and Cambridge.

The bridge had been a problem for centuries. As it was essential to one of the main transport links to Ely it was the responsibility of the Bishop to see it remained in good repair. Otherwise people had to either wade across the once-wide river or pay a toll to use the ferry. But it was the Bishop who supplied the ferryman, and the Bishop who took the profits from the travellers' fees. So it was a case of either the Bishop paid out for repairs and people crossed free, or he saved expense, inconvenienced travellers and received a steady income. Obviously there was no contest – a ferry it was for most of the time.

But maintaining the track either side of it was also an expense. The Bishop had made his tenants of the various Episcopal manors responsible for certain lengths of the causeway as part of the rent for their lands. However since many of his tenants lived far away in places such as Leverington or Upwell and never had occasion themselves to use that track, the idea of them arranging for peasants to journey and do the work themselves was most inconvenient. So they were encouraged to make a money payment instead. And once payments had begun, the Bishop had no reason to stop them.

But at times when there'd been no Bishop the repairs were down to the Crown and the situation became worse. By 1638 there had been no bridge for 25 years and several travellers had lost their lives trying to cross the river. But with the outbreak of the Civil War all such approaches had been once more of military significance and were guarded by Parliamentary forces.

Latterly things had improved. By 1765 the bridge was back in use again, only for the two middle piers to collapse, rendering the crossing impossible. But by then work had started to construct a road from Stretham towards Chittering and Waterbeach and this was soon the preferred route. So it would be interesting to see whether he could get through now.

As he approached Aldreth Smith's keen eye noted two dwellings standing in an otherwise lonely place. By the door of one was a young girl whose appearance was so extraordinary that he'd stopped to learn her story. But the girl, on his approach, had gone running inside, slamming the door as she did so. Almost immediately a rough labouring man appeared from the adjacent cottage. He'd peered at Smith suspiciously but had then recognised him – he'd attended one or two of his sales - and gave his name as Daniel Cockle.

The girl, he was told, was little Annie Stokes. She'd been standing in the room of her cottage during a thunderstorm when lightning had struck a tree in an adjoining field. The electric fluid had travelled in a direct line to the house, entered the back door and into her lower body, paralysing both feet. Remarkably she'd survived that event and had regained the use of her

limbs. But her leg and thigh had been imprinted with a scarlet representation of the tree itself – the trunk, branches and leaves were clearly visible.

But did Cockle know anything of the battles that were said to have occurred along the route of the Causeway. Indeed he did: several people had found hoards of ancient weapons at a farm called the Hempsals. He had himself seen a knight in armour on the skeleton of a horse – the man wore a god ring on his finger with a red stone in it. Would Smith like to see it? Indeed he did and was led around the back of the cottage to a ramshacked outbuilding. When the door was open the walls were alive with one furry mass as thousands of mice rushed up and down. Cockle had not been perturbed but had pushed his way inside to return with the ancient figure. It was about just as the man had described it, except it was just a toy, three inches high, and although it may have been Roman it looked all too like one of those peddled by Cheap Jack Zita from her cart.

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The passage across the fen from Aldreth towards Rampton proved far less difficult than Smith had feared. True the route was rutted by the wheels of farm carts and pock-marked with numerous hoof prints but when he arrived at the bridge itself it was in a passable condition. He'd paused for a while to watch the barges carrying their cargoes towards Earith before continuing his journey.

Soon he spotted the ancient fortified enclosure of Belsar's Hill, a large circular camp whose ramparts stood out above the surrounding unenclosed fenland. Although the historians believed it was a Norman construction, there was something about it which seemed to Smith's eye somewhat older. Some people claimed that the Aldreth Causeway dated back to Roman times, so why should this not be a Roman camp, for they too had needed to invade the island of Ely, centuries before the Conqueror. Certainly Roman coins had been found in and around the area.

But if the causeway was peaceful, the inhabitants of Rampton were up in arms as he learned after he stopped at the village blacksmith for attention to his horse's shoes. Here he found Steven Chevas chewing the fat with Thomas Young and James Paine who reported that they, like so many communities, were in the process of radical change as the enclosure movement moved inexorably on. And the problem was sheep.

In Rampton two flocks of roughly equal size were pastured on the open lands. One was the 'town flock' to which every occupier of ten acres of ploughed land had a right to put his sheep and share the cost of finding hurdles and paying the shepherd's wages. The other was the 'manor flock' that belonged to the Lord of the Manor. But when some years ago the Manor Farm, which consisted of 500 acres had been divided up, Robert Ivatt had bought the farmhouse and a third of the land which he added to the another 120 acres he already owned. Now he was claiming the right to put an unlimited number of sheep in the town sheep-walk as well a separate right of feeding and folding an unlimited number in the manor flock. It meant that his animals were everywhere and he could put out as many as he wanted. This was not fair, smaller owners complained: he should only be allowed to pasture such sheep as he could keep and maintain on his own lands over the winter. It looked something that was bound cause problems in the years to come.

Perhaps, Elliott Smith, speculated, he might be able to be of some assistance should the matter come to court.

There were a couple of items of interest in Rampton, should Pickwick ever find himself in that part of the county. One was the church, an ancient thatched building in whose damp interior – for the roof was in poor condition – lay the effigy of an ancient knight. The other was something that could not be overlooked – for how could one overlook a giant.

Not that anybody really knew just which giant it was that had constructed the quadrangular mound with its deep and broad ditch that commanded the route between Rampton and Cottenham. But how strange that the village should be defended on two of its approaches!

However if the identify of the ancient Rampton giant had been forgotten, most people knew the tale of the gigantic Willingham boy. Thomas Hall had been born in the village in October 1741. He'd grow wonderfully for nine months, just taking his mother's milk. But when she died suddenly people feared he would not survive. Yet the baby continued to thrive and by the time he was three years old stood three feet nine inches high. His voice was very coarse like a man's, his weight was above four stone and he was strong enough to overcome boys of six, seven or eight years of age. Indeed in one outburst of rage he'd he picked up a blacksmith's hammer weighing 17lb and thrown it across the room.

Thomas just kept growing. He shot up two-and-a-half inches between the August and November of 1744, before dying, as if of extreme old age, in September 1747, being then four feet six inches high and upwards of seven stone in weight.

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Why should a flat country like Cambridgeshire, boast so many giants, pondered Pickwick: there was the unknown Giant of Rampton, the Gog and Magog giants commemorated on the hills at Wandlebury, and now a Willingham boy.

But that was only the part of it. Going way back in folklore there was Thomas Hickathrift, who was living at about the time that William the Conqueror was assaulting Ely. Like the Willingham lad Thomas had been a prodigious youth: when aged ten he already stood six feet high and three feet across, with hands like a shoulder of mutton and everything else in proportion..

Like many lads he was lazy, preferring to sit and toast his toes in front of the fire. One day his mother sent him to fetch some straw from a nearby farm. On arrival he was told he could have as much as he could carry so, not wanting to repeat the journey, he bundled up a massive pile, slung it over his shoulder and carried it home, to the astonishment of the farmer. Shortly afterwards he visited a neighbouring village where locals were holding a 'throw-the-hammer' contest. Tom casually tossed it nearly a mile into the river.

News of his strength reached the ears of a Wisbech brewer who wanted somebody to carry beer through the 'Smeeth' to King's Lynn. It was a job made difficult by the presence an even bigger giant that lived in the marsh and delighted in cutting the head off any travellers, stringing them from the bows of a tree. Inevitably there was a battle, Tom taking the wheel of the brewer's cart to act as a shield and the axle for a sword. And of course the lad won. He entered the ogre's den where he found an immense store of hold and silver which he used to build himself a house on the spot.

But then the hero himself turned nuisance, challenging all comers to prove their mettle. He won each contest until Henry Nonsuch, a tinker from King's Lynn, felled him with his cudgel. The defeat sealed their friendship. Together they assisted the sheriff to suppress a rebellion, the two men putting an entire army to flight. It brought him more fame, and a knighthood. Now he was Sir Thomas Hickathrift.

Not everybody appreciated his strength: Sir Thomas courted a Cambridge girl, Sarah Gedyng who had another suitor in the form of a local lad. Inevitably the matter had to be settled in combat which saw one of them kicked so hard that he flew through the air and landed on the

thatched roof of a nearby cottage. Needless to say Tom got the girl, but their rejoicing was cut short by news of a fiery dragon accompanied by innumerable lions and bears that had landed in Thanet and was threatening the kingdom.

Once more Tom and his tinker friend set off for battle, this time with an ogre with one eye as big as a butcher's basin in the middle of his forehead. The head was soon rolling in the dirt, some distance from its body while a fountain of blood spurted up as high as the heavens.

After that it was time to retire. Sir Thomas passed the rest of his days in great content until he was buried in the churchyard of Tilney All Saints where a memorial is inscribed on the wall of the chancel. It was all a tale that increased the more it was told – even the Willingham gigantic youth was credited with repeating the hammer-throwing incident. And as for a champion fighter – why there is another one not far away, in the churchyard at Bluntisham. Here amongst the overgrown tombstones is one that bears a rhyme

"Here lyes the conqueror conquered,
Valiant as ever England bred,
Whom neither art, nor steel, nor strength
Could e're subdue, till death at length
Threw him on his back; and here he lyes
In hopes hereafter to arise"

This marks the grave of Adrian Lucas, a prize-fighter and wrestler who died in May 1671. Yet while the tales of Hickathrift continue to be told, very little is known of this more recent hero.

But nobody will forget the Cambridge giant.

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Cambridge had its own giant – or at least so the advertising posters claimed - yet Elliott Smith, the font of knowledge of all sorts could find but little fact. His name was Thomas Bell – a common name in Cambridge circles. His father had been a blacksmith, well-built enough as blacksmiths went, but nothing exceptional. The lad when young showed no indications of becoming a veritable Goliath. He was apprenticed to his father but then he just started to grow.

Soon people were flocking, not to have their horses shod but just to gawp at the young Tom. It was not just his height - he stood seven feet two inches - but his hands that attracted attention: they were nearly a foot long. His middle finger was six inches in length which was itself the size of an ordinary person's hand. Add to that he was double-jointed.

In fact so many curious and inquisitive persons kept interrupting him in his work that the blacksmith business suffered and it got to the stage when he was forced to give up his apprenticeship to make a precarious living travelling the country, exhibiting himself at the principal towns and fairs.

In Roe's print ship on King's Parade Pickwick purchased a portrait of the 'Cambridge Giant' dressed in a collegiate gown, that had been taken at the Hog in the Pound in Oxford Street in May 1813 when was 36 years of age. He added it to those in his scrapbook, which was by now beginning to bulge.

Meanwhile Elliott Smith continued with his account of his journey. Leaving Willingham he had jogged on to a village he knew well, Over. Here he always took the opportunity to visit the farm in Fen End that was home to Thomas Robinson, his wife Ann and their five

delightful daughters. There was Drusilla and her twin brother Tom, Biddy, Ann, Priscilla and the newest arrival, baby Selina

But what sort of a place was it for children to grow up in? More than 40 men were on the parish poor rate – and that was because Willingham and Swavesey farmers owned much of the land in Over but made a point of employing labourers from their own villages. And there was no incentive to work when a man with a wife and four children was entitled to more than ten shillings for doing nothing. By working hard in private employment he could only earn twelve bob and would have to spend the difference in additional sustenance for himself. So what was the point of working?

Robinson had decided to do something about it; he employed twelve of the best men – men who could easily get work if they chose – and set them to work digging a piece of his own land at threepence a rod. They earned that week only about seven-and-six each, though they might have earned twelve, and the next week they disappeared to a man.

Whenever the men felt they had a grievance against a decision of the Overseers of the Poor they would appeal to magistrates - and the magistrates always backed them. Once Robinson had refused payment to some of the men who would not keep their proper hours of work on the road; they complained to the magistrates in Cambridge and beat him as usual. They celebrated in several taverns then staggered back to Over wearing favours in their hats and button-holes. Just to re-emphasise their victory, that evening the malingerers collected in front of his house and shouted in triumph!

Things had got so bad that a few years ago the parish meeting decided that instead of paying men to do nothing, they would give them an excursion to Liverpool. Six local lads joined a group of thirty from Willingham and a dozen from Haddenham who set off to seek a new life for themselves in a new land, America.

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Longstanton was a parish in turmoil. The problem was it had two churches. St Michael's is a beautiful specimen of a complete Early-English chapel with a high-pitched thatched roof over the nave, a thatched porch and two aisles containing some original mosaic glass. All Saints by contrast is in a pure Decorated style though the tower and spire are early Perpendicular. But its gloomy: the East window is good but those in the transept are dilapidated and blocked with mortar and most of the nave windows are missing their mullions. The interior is inaccessible as the south transept is the burial place of the Hatton family with a large alabaster tomb complete with recumbent effigies, dating from the mid 1600s

The family came into prominence after Christopher Hatton attracted the attention of Queen Elizabeth 'for the comeliness of his person and his grace in dancing'. Although not trained as a lawyer he was appointed High Chancellor and a privy councillor and knighted. Another Sir Christopher was created a Baronet by King Charles I and set up home in Longstanton. They've been there ever since, marrying into local families. But the male line has now died out after Sir Thomas Dingley Hatton fell from his curricle in September 1812 when returning from Cambridge. It's strange he should die following an accident as his father had built a private road from the turnpike almost directly to his house in the centre of the village with tollgate about half way along to raise money for its maintenance.

They've been a great influence in the village – and not only for the best. The Rev James Atkins, when he was Rector of St Michael's, was sure that much of the land that had once gone with that parish had been purloined by the Hatton family, who were lords of the Manor of All Saint's, in order to minimize their payment of tithes and rates. In 1794 he went to court to try and sort it out once and for all. His claim revolved around a farm of 900 acres of sheep

walk called Bourgoynes flock on which tithes should be paid to him. He'd done his homework, searching through the ancient documents in the charter chest of Trinity College. There he'd found a terrier which showed that his parish had once been in the form of a cross and the disputed land was definitely in St Michael's.

However the Hattons argued this was not a legal document since any such the charter should be filed amongst the Bishop's papers. But he'd searched and it wasn't there. Surely the Trinity College copy was sufficient? No said the judge: had it been in the parish chest that would have been proof, but the college copy could not be accepted as evidence.

But what about the actual parish boundaries? There'd been no beatings of the bounds for as long as anybody could remember and at present the two parishes were so mixed up that nobody knew where one started and the other finished. Matters had been made more complicated as the Hatton family had leased the glebe land from the rectors of St Michael's and mixed them up with their own property. But Sir Thomas contended he had done everything he could to rectify the matter and ensured that the right amount of land was recognised as belonging to each parish, even though the precise location of it was uncertain. And as for the tithes, well the Hattons had been paying forty shillings in lieu of tithes of wool and lamb and even both rectors had taken tithe from land which to all other purposes belonged to the other parish. There really was no way it could be sorted out now. So despite his best endeavours Atkins was beaten.

Then when the Inclosure Commissioners redrew the boundary in 1816 they placed 1,938 acres in All Saints and only 841 acres in St. Michael's, excluding several areas which Atkins had regarded as belonging to his parish, the battle had been truly lost. But by then the Hatton estate was jointly owned by six sisters, now its split between the three of them who are unmarried. What will happen to it in the future – well there'd soon be work for somebody well versed in land transactions – like Elliott Smith

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There were, Smith noted, two Longstantons – St Michael's and All Saints. People might not know where one stopped and the other began, but at least they were side by side. However there were two parishes called Conington and they were in different counties miles apart.

One was just off the Great North Road in Huntingdonshire. It boasted a castle that could trace its story back to Turkill the Dane. It had been home to one of William the Conqueror's nieces before becoming the property of a King of Scotland. On the site Sir Robert Bruce Cotton had built a grand mansion house that contained the room in which Mary Queen of Scots had been beheaded. Mary had been executed at Fotheringay Castle but when that had been demolished Sir Robert had moved the pillars and arches stone by stone to Conington. They were not there now, for by the early 1700s his house was in ruins and once more the historic stones had been loaded on to carts and trundled off, this time to another Cotton seat in Bedfordshire.

The Conington estate had been sold to Sir John Heathcote. He had plenty of money – his father had been one of the founders of the Bank of England and a Lord Mayor of London. But money could not bring health or happiness. Although several children had been born to him, none had survived for any length of time. Then came a lad they named John, after his father. By 1773 he had attained the ripe old age of five years but his health was still delicate. So they decided to journey to take the waters at Bath.

It was there that they found Thomas Gainsborough, then at the height of his fame as an artist. The Heathcotes decided to have John's portrait painted and applied for a sitting. He claimed he already had sufficient commissions and declined the request, saying he was only there for

his health – which was a lie, he'd been earning his living from his brushes for thirteen years. Sir John was not to be put off so easily. He knew something of Gainsborough's background and how he'd started his career working from humble lodgings in Hatton Garden. And they of course were close friends of the Hatton family!

So the Heathcotes prevailed on Gainsborough to hear their tale of distress, how their other children had fallen victims to the epidemic and only John was spared to them. They greatly desired to possess his portrait for fear he should be taken too. In this way, and through their obviously aristocratic connections, they prevailed on the great man to at least take a look at the lad.

But how should he be dressed for his one chance to impress? Gainsborough had been approached to paint dozens of boys, why should he take any notice of this one? Then inspiration struck. So next day when they took John to the studio in the Circus he was attired in a black plumed hat, scarlet shoes, a blue sash – and a plain white muslin frock! Their plan worked, the portrait was painted and has hung in Conington castle ever since. Few people have ever seen it – for the lad lived and became owner of the estate. Yet every visitor to his stately home asks the same question – who is the little girl?

That 'girl' went on to marry, become a Member of Parliament and make Conington a place to which he could invite friends to enjoy the local sport. Nearby was the shimmering lake of Whittlesey Mere but guests did not have to journey that far: they could step into a gun-boat from the windows of the castle dining room and paddle across to shoot coots without getting their feet wet. He also established a deer park on the slope of the nearby Round Hill from whose summit he could enjoy sweeping views across the surrounding countryside calling in one of the great landscape designers to assist the transformation. That was Samuel Lapridge, assistant to the Great Capability Brown – who himself was much more familiar with the other Conington.

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Like its Huntingdonshire namesake the Cambridgeshire Conington also boasted a stately house that had once belonged to one of the grandest families in the area: the Cottons. But the last Conington Cotton, Thomas had died in a drunken rage in 1729 after his only surviving daughter eloped with his attorney, Dingley Askham. He had no time to cut her out of his will and so the happy couple moved in to his mansion. Dingley left his mark in the village by rebuilding the church nave and strengthening the tower with massive slanting buttresses. He also constructed a brick vault in which he was buried at the ripe old age of 86.

Their youngest daughter married Sir Thomas Hatton of Longstanton and so Conington descended with the Hatton estates until 1813. At inclosure the house was assigned to Harriet the wife of the Rev Philip Gardner. Together they rebuilt it at considerable expense but after Philip's death in 1826 – aged 95 – his son moved away and the stately house was let to tenants. Now it seemed likely to continue as a rented property, depriving the village of the personal attention of a landed family.

However there were plenty of other Cottons in the locality, including one branch at Landwade. They were a long-lived breed who traditionally gave the first-born son the Christian-name 'John'. Indeed the John who died in 1593 at the age of 83 had been followed by five other 'Johns' each of whom lived to be well over 70. There were other family traditions including a love of hard drinking and a passion for women.

Many of the Johns successfully wooed heiresses - indeed some of them married several - and traditionally spent their acquired fortunes in a handsome manner. John II had three wives, the

last of whom finally supplied his. She much younger than himself and once a widow soon remarried and moved to another mansion, this one at Cheveley. John Cotton III followed in his father's footsteps and married an heiress, Jane Hynde of Madingley Hall to which mansion the Cottons moved in the middle 1600s.

But it was Sir John Hynde Cotton – John the Vth – who took the family to its highest position in society. In 1727 he was elected as Member of Parliament for Cambridge though his celebrations were short lived when he was presented with a large bill. Many tradesmen had offered generous inducements to their customer to encourage them to vote and now wanted payment. Horrified, Sir John promptly withdrew his custom from them, whereupon the Whigs and Tories combined to turn him out! He found himself another parliamentary seat and a rich widow to be his second wife. In his youth he'd been a handsome man but he grew fat and suffered with gout. It got so severe that his butler, Tom, suggested Sir John cut down his consumption of port from six bottles a day to just three. He replied in verse

"Tom, lookee d'ye see
I know you are honest, and right you may be,
But if 'twont bear six bottles, 'tis no leg for me"

It was this Sir John who made a gravel road from Madingley to Cambridge. He also enclosed the park and stocked it with deer. But the deer ate the trees so his son, Sir John Hynde Cotton VI did away with them. He too married an heiress, the daughter of a Lord Mayor of London who owned a large brewery and he was soon doing his best to empty both her purse and her barrels. They had a son – inevitably named John – but the lad died young so the title passed to the spare heir, Charles. Then things went badly wrong.

Charles became an Admiral but broke with tradition and named his son 'St Vincent'. The lad was educated at Westminster and Christ Church, Oxford, served in the Light Dragoons and built up a reputation as a great sportsman. He also became infamous for his gambling losses, being dubbed 'Vinny Cotton' or 'St Vincent Twist'. Now he was now eking out a living as a stagecoach driver on the London to Brighton road. The queue of ladies anxious to marry into the family had dried up and it seemed that soon the Cotton dynasty would die out.

They were already being forgotten. The ancestral Landwade mansion had been pulled down and the stones incorporated into a farmhouse. Now even the gilt names on the coffins in the family vault had disappeared after the church tower collapsed and the gypsies got in

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Elliott Smith, as auctioneer and surveyor, was used to travelling the length and breadth of the county. But even he was confused by all the new roads that were being laid out in parish after parish as part of the Enclosure movements. Such improvements were expensive – in Dry Drayton they had resulted in the near bankruptcy of one of the larger landowners.

Enclosure there had been initiated by the largest landowners, as was usually the case. The Reverend Samuel Smith, who owned over half the total acreage, got the backing of the other three principal proprietors. Below them came four people who owned a few acres and at the bottom of the pile were the ordinary peasants and who worried about the small men.

It would all have been straightforward except for the inevitable troublemaker. King John Haggerston was one of the larger owners with 300 acres and he objected to the number of Commissioners who should be appointed to see the process through – there ought to be three of them so they'd be an odd number when it came to any vote on contentious issues. In this he got his way. But the most contentious issue was to involve himself

The process took its usual course; they held their meetings, appointed a clerk, banker and surveyor. They got their Act of Parliament in 1809, then received claims for land to be allocated in place of the strips in the old open fields. There were a few objections that were sorted out before the draft award was read and agreed. By 1811 it was all over. One of the losers was King John. At the start of the process he'd farmed 300 acres, by the time things had finished he was down to just 200 – the rest had gone to the rector, in lieu of tithes.

Everybody now had to fork out to cover the costs - £450 for the paperwork involved in getting the Act, £320 for the clerk, £358 for the commissioners' costs, £373 to the surveyor, £438 for public fencing and another massive £737 for the cost of making the new roads that had been set out. On top of that King John Haggerston, like everybody else, had to pay to fence his own allocated acres. The process had been unsettling and expensive but all that was now behind them. Or so they thought.

It came as a shock when they got another bill two years later. It seemed the surveyor had got his sums wrong and needed another £1,870 to finish off the roads. Even though somebody discovered a supply of gravel within the parish enabling the bill to be cut by £500 it was still a massive blow. Many refused to pay until the Commissioners threatened to seize their goods and chattels.

King John went to court arguing that the extra charge was illegal: under the act of parliament the Commissioners' authority ceased had once the Enclosure award had been executed and they had no power to set another rate. Everything ground to a halt while the legal process took its course. He lost. So John was not one to let the matter lay, so in November 1817 he challenged that ruling. The Commissioners did not have to have finished the roads but they must have worked out the costs and included that sum in their final award. As it was they'd been totally incompetent and obviously underestimated the price. That was their hard luck – it was quite clear once the landowners had paid the bill that was that. They couldn't be expected to fork out more, years later. There was another point: in the Act there was a clause saying that if the surveyors failed to complete the roads on time they were to pay a forfeit of twenty shillings. Instead of King John paying them, they should be paying him

But the Commissioners said it was impossible to know what the roads bill would be until they were actually finished. If they'd waited until the roads were completed before they implemented the award this would have delayed the whole process for years. Surely their powers and responsibilities should continue until the whole process was complete. Once more the court found in their favour

King John Haggerson and the others were ordered to pay up. But he refused and turned abusive, threatening to question all the other accounts too. However when they sent in the bailiffs he had no choice but to mortgage his land to raise the money. Even then he flew into a rage when forced to hand over the cheque, vowing vengeance. Within a few years he sold up and moved away. Enclosure was supposed to have brought him a chance of prosperity; instead it had brought him to his knees.

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The problems of new roads was one that was affecting Fen Drayton too, Smith continued. Like other parishes they were engaged in the process of Enclosure with commissioners currently setting out carriageways and footways over Harrow Meadow and Oxholme Commons and the Holywell Ferry Road.

All of the principal landowners were watching events carefully, except the vicar. For the incumbent was never there – indeed none of the ministers had resided in the parish since the

end of the Civil War. They were mainly fellows of Christ's College who had their own interests, usually theological. But the current incumbent, Hugh Bacon however was different – he was involved in gas.

In 1829 he and another clergyman, Rev Kilby, had obtained a patent for a new method of gas lighting which involved the use of a glass chimney. It gave double the illumination for the same consumption of gas. In 1830 it was publicly tried at Manchester by Dr Dalton, Mr Davies and the Directors of the Manchester Gas Company who produced a testimonial to its superior qualities. Other scientific men agreed.

The Reverend Bacon basked in the glow of his fame, but then a shadow descended in the shape of the London Gas Company. In 1835 he was forced to initiate legal proceedings against them claiming they were selling a burner that was virtually identical to his. They retorted that it had been invented by their engineer, Mr Hutchison and was only one of numerous developments he had pioneered. They'd been announced in the technical journals and endorsed by a correspondent who signed himself 'Clovis'.

However Rev Bacon knew more about the subject than anybody else and was able to show that these 'inventions' claimed by Hutchison had in fact been made by other engineers who had written up their discoveries in journals such as 'The Mechanic's Magazine', 'Newton's London Journal of Arts and Sciences' and 'Iron', a weekly magazine for iron and steel manufacturers – all of which were unlikely reading for a Cambridge academic parson. What's more the apparently impartial 'Clovis' who had been so prominent in his praise was none other than Hutchison himself.

Then 'Clovis' had turned on him claiming Bacon's own invention was a 'notoriously objectionable and destructive burner'. The whole matter had ended up in court. The scientific debate was so technical that nobody could understand quite what it was all about but the final verdict came down against the Fen Drayton vicar.

Subsequently he and his opponent came together to produce 'Hutchison's patent burner', bringing light to a dark world. But now another company had arranged for a quantity of these to be made by another manufacturer, Jones and Talby, which they were supplying to their customers at the same prices as they paid for them.

This both Bacon and Hutchison considered to be a counterfeit device and an infringement of their patent so now the Vicar of Fen Drayton was busy with his lawyers once more trying to ensure they won their case. He certainly had no time for the niceties of a sermon to a few dozen country parishioners.

Meanwhile another battle over gas was raging within Cambridge itself with the Improvement Commissioners engaged in legal proceedings against a town councilor over his failure to produce sufficient light for the newly erected street lamps. Perhaps Bacon's help could be sought on this problem too

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While the vicar of Fen Drayton might be lighting the world, Cambridge was not getting on too well with its gas supply

The Cambridge Improvement Commissioners had been talking about lighting the streets for years, trying to decide whether oil gas or coal gas would be the better alternative. Finally in 1822 they made up their mind and placed a contract with James Smith Hancock to install and light 250 lamps with his oil gas – it would provide a brilliant illumination, he promised. Hancock erected a building for making the gas in the Barnwell gravel pits, put up the lamps and Cambridge sprang into light

Sadly no sooner had they been lit than people were claiming they were getting dimmer – something to do with the build-up of carbon (something people had difficulty in understanding) – and they were costing more than he said (something everybody understood all too well). So four years later the Commissioners decided to think again and sought new tenders with the contractor undertaking to find the lamps, lay the mains, make good the pavements and supply the full service.

It was then that John Grafton came on the scene. He was just a young man but had worked on coal gas in London, Manchester, Sheffield, Carlisle, Stockport and Wolverhampton. He'd obtained various patents and was really the leading light in this field. Together with his associates, men from Manchester, Stamford and Coggishall, he won the contract and formed the Cambridge Gas Light and Coke Company. They established a new gasworks off Newmarket Road, close to the river where the coal needed could be easily unloaded from barges. The works were amongst the best in the country with a new gasometer transforming the look of the area.

John bought himself a big house in Maids Causeway, got married and started busily raising a family. Although he still traveled all around the country working on projects, Cambridge became his home. Soon however things went downhill

Commissioners were adamant that they weren't getting enough light. Complaints came in at meeting after meeting so Mr Smith, their surveyor, went out on a tour of inspection. He took a man as a witness who wrote down what he saw. They reported that on six nights there were upwards of 70 lamps in a bad state with the Newnham and Black Ditch area particularly poorly lit.

Grafton retorted that he was producing more light than promised. Under his contract the flame had to be three inches wide – and they were considerably above that – four inches on average. He knew how much gas was being produced and consumed every hour at the gas works and got Mr Wilson the foreman to testify that he'd measured it on a Sunday night. But how much of that was being consumed by private lamps, commissioners asked - many inns and colleges had their lights on that day too.

He was taking great trouble to ensure the lights were maintained, Grafton continued. In London every gaslighter had 100 lamps to look after, but in Cambridge it was only 80. The lamp-lighters went round to ensure that all the lamps were clean and correct, though one man had been discharged for negligence, he conceded.

Alderman Hallack thought the principal problem was that the men were not turning the gas on properly at the light. Grafton denied this – they were told to turn them on full. But under questioning the lamplighter foreman admitted he never turned all the gas on in the lamps when he first lit them because if he did it could break the glass. Nor did he go round a second time to regulate the light. That was the problem: every consumer knew that when they first turned the gas on in the evening it would blaze away much beyond what was wanted, but after a short time you had to turn it up to get a good light. This was not being done with the street lights so by nine o'clock there was a deficient flame. The Commissioners imposed a fine.

Cambridge was learning to cope with the increase of crime caused by gas street lamps. Elderly folk fondly reminisced how in the good old days the streets had been so dark that you could not see who you were passing in the street. And if you could not see them, you certainly could not see to fight them!

Now some people were suggesting that gas should be used for other purposes, as Elliott Smith explained.

In February 1837 Mr Sharpe of Northampton gave two lectures to the Mechanics Institution on the economy and efficiency of cooking by gas. He'd demonstrated the various apparatus and culinary utensils, producing an excellent supper of fish, flesh and fowl and emphasizing that as well as roasting, boiling, frying and baking gas could be used for other purposes – even heating a room. The first meeting had been well attended, the second packed and already some people had installed the new mechanisms.

But was it safe? Mr Deck had undertaken a series of experiments and reported that no effluvia or bad flavours were imparted to the meat and that the animal juices were retained to a much greater extent – you don't get the waste that you do when cooking before a fire. It's also particularly useful to businessmen who may be detained at their engagements as the completion of the joint for the table can be deferred without detriment. He was quite willing to demonstrate his cooking apparatus to anybody wanting to see it.

Now the Corporation was considering lighting the Town Hall with gas. Charles Humfrey had spoken to both Grafton and Prince and reported that the former would complete the fittings for £60, including the ventilation of the room. They would need thirty burners, five in each of the small chandeliers and ten in the large one. Mr Deighton disagreed: he thought that 30 burners would be enough for the main hall and two of the small chandeliers should be spared for the other rooms. But that would spoil the overall effect, Humfrey objected

Other councillors thought they also ought to light the entrance to the large room and the rooms adjoining: when there was a ball all the rooms were in use and it was not right to have gas in one and only candles in the others.

It would cost one pound ever time it was used but what if not all the lights were needed? Surely it would be more economic to have a meter and only pay for what was consumed. Mr Wells advised that before he had a meter he was paying £15 a year for his gas, now it was down to £6. However Charles Humfrey disagreed: he'd tried both ways and found the meter more expensive. But then he did live in a large house.

Would they get the money back in more bookings, councillors wondered. Who could tell, for income varied: in 1836 they'd got £23 for the hire of the room but last year it was only £7. That was because £20 had come from Messrs Angeloes for the use of the town hall as a fencing room, you couldn't be sure just what would come along.

As the debate began to become heated one gentleman had to be reminded that any holder of gas shares who voted in council proceedings was liable to a fine of £50. And all that was a bit queer as for John Grafton had got himself elected to the Town Council anyway.

Smith could not understand all the concern with lighting; if there was one thing Cambridge needed more it was water. In a town in this the first year of a new, Victorian, era it was ridiculous that people were still drinking water that ran down pipes that were old before the University arrived!

Pickwick ordered another cup of coffee while Elliott Smith visited the offices before embarking on his account of the fight for clean water.

Before the coming of the colleges, Cambridge was already home to a number of religious houses. One of these was a Franciscan Friary on the site of the present Sidney Sussex College in Sidney Street. The monks needed something to drink and the river was a long way off.

They first laid a stone channel to bring water from the fields out at Barnwell but this soon proved inadequate. So then they decided to construct a pipeline to bring a supply of clean drinking water from a place called Bradrusshe on the Madingley Road. Here a number of springs come to the surface which they channelled to a conduit head – it still stands in a field, Smith reported.

The monks negotiated with seventeen different owners to buy up a long strip of land, two feet wide and over 5,500 feet long and dug a trench through the fields, crossing the river near Garret Hostel Island before continuing down a street called King's Childer Lane to their friary. In it they laid lead pipes to carry the water to their home. It was a mighty undertaking but it was worth it for they had water which they shared with the townsfolk. For more than a century all was well except that whenever the aqueduct required repair they dug up the ground above it, making great openings in the streets and lanes to the annoyance of travellers.

However in 1209 following disturbances in Oxford, scholars had started to arrive in Cambridge and soon began to build colleges so they could live and work together. One of these was King’s Hall, on the site of part of the present Trinity College. As it expanded in 1433 so it took in King’s Childer Lane and the pipe that had ran down the lane now crossed the centre of their new court. Scholars also need water so they asked permission to take some out of the pipe, it would not affect the Friars, they claimed, and should the pipe break under their ground the college would repair it.

But the Friars were unhappy with the idea and the disputes that followed had finally to be resolved by seeking the judgement of the King. The result was unsurprising: the college got their water and when Henry VIII abolished the friary in 1538 he granted the watercourse in its entirety to Trinity College.

The scholars used the water in their college kitchen but in 1601 the College decided to invest some money on an ornate stone fountain employing the skills of the finest craftsmen to carve various beasts to decorate it. When King James I visited the college in 1615 it was repaired and repainted to be ready for his admiration. But the fountain was poorly constructed and extensive repairs were needed in 1661-2 and 1672-3. Despite these in 1716 it had to be completely rebuilt by Robert Gumbold - the work took 25 weeks and cost £183 13s. 6.

He made various changes reducing the number of taps from eight to one, cutting the number of steps from four to three, changing the lions on the arches to human faces and taking down the weathercock. Then he painted it to preserve the stonework, with some gilt decorations. But within 50 years it had to be repaired again and in 1821 the steps had to be replaced. Now all the pipes are in need of renewal.

But the fountain is more than an ornament. One of the instructions to college porters is to keep watch on any college servant who tries to sell the water to townsfolk but despite this many Cambridge people find that its excellent water for making tea- and its far better than what comes out of the conduit on Market Hill.

The absence of clean drinking water came to prominence in 1574 while Cambridge was enduring one of several recurring bouts of plague. Andrew Perne, Master of Peterhouse and Vice Chancellor of the University had no doubts as to the reason: “Our synnes is the principle cause; the other, as I conjecture, is the corruption of the King’s Ditch”

The King’s Ditch was an open watercourse that ran round the eastern side of Cambridge, starting at the Cam near Quayside, continuing across the Franciscan Friar’s site and along Mill Lane back to the river. It had been conceived as a defence by Henry III back in 1267 but soon became more of an open sewer.

Perne suggested that Vicar’s Brook, a natural stream running from the south of Cambridge, should be diverted to flow into the ditch so as to flush it out. But, being Cambridge, nothing was done. The idea was revived in 1607 by James Montagu, master of Sidney Sussex College, inheritors of the Friar’s site. They were by then finding the stinking ditch across their gardens to be particularly offensive. It was so bad he was prepared to give 100 marks of his own money to get the work started.

A group of both University and townspeople got together in a scheme for their common good. The plan was to construct a three-mile watercourse to bring water from a series of natural springs at Nine Wells in the parish of Gt Shelford. They would use the natural watercourse of the Vicar’s Brook as a base but then divert the water down a one-mile long man-made canal and along the middle of Trumpington Street to the gateway of Pembroke College where it would flow into the King’s Ditch. But it had little effect.

A Conduit Head was constructed at the corner of Lensfield Road where the main watercourse terminated in an artificial pond. Some water continued down Trumpington Street though in the 1790s it was diverted from the centre of the road to runnels on either side, as it still does – Pickwick knew this all too well from his accident outside Peterhouse

Two other underground channels were added. One branch was constructed in 1631 along Lensfield Road, Regent Terrace and St. Andrew's Street before splitting into two runs. One fed ponds at Emmanuel College before continuing to Christ's where it provides water for the college swimming pool. Another continues down St. Andrew's Street flowing along either side of the road before finally going underground into part of the original King's Ditch.

An earlier spur had been laid in 1614 to bring water to the town centre. It ran down Tennis Court Road, then over the corner of a field owned by Thomas Hobson, across St Andrews Hill to Market Hill. Here a conduit was erected by Henry King and Nathaniel Cradock. The cost was supposed to be met jointly by the University and Town but by 1620 many of the townsfolk had not paid their share, leaving the men out of pocket to the tune of about £100. They complained to the King who wrote to the Vice Chancellor and Mayor urging them to ensure proper steps were taken to defray the costs and keep the works in good repair.

Ten years later both Town and Gown mourned the death of one of Cambridge’s greatest characters, Thomas Hobson. In his will in 1631 he specified that the income from several acres of land at ‘Swinescroft’ should be used to maintain the Conduit. But Hobson also added another £10 so that the top of the conduit might be made half a yard higher. This addition transformed the appearance of the original relatively plain conduit and an inscription in his memory was added to it. This was his only memorial stone, there being none to mark his burial place in the chancel of St Bene’t’s church. It is odd, mused Smith, that such a small expenditure has ensured that his name would be linked not only to the fountain but to the whole scheme, whilst those who actually carried it into fruition are largely forgotten.

"Mr Deck has been analysing waters taken from Trinity and Hobson's Conduit, the bore in King Street and a well on King's Parade", Smith continued. "It seems the Trinity water is particularly good for making tea and the water from Hobson's Conduit comes ready warmed – it's 49 degrees at its source and up to 58 by the time it reaches the market place.

"The springs supply 60 gallons per minute and the water is of excellent quality for domestic and other purposes; apparently it contains carbonate and sulphate of lime, with a small trace of magnesia. But there's a great difference in the purity of the water between where it comes out of the ground and where it is obtained from the Conduit. This is due – according to Deck – because of the channel it runs down, its exposure to the air, and the great accumulation of weeds impeding its progress which adds to the vegetable matter and other things it carries. He says this is no bad thing, because the greater the purity of the water so its worse impact on the pipes - the saline and earthy matters act as a preservative from the injurious impregnation of the lead.

"But at present there's no water whatsoever from the Conduit; it neither runs, nor even drips. Probably the old pipes are totally corroded by time – so why not replace them with iron pipes which will be more durable and cheaper. And assuming that new pipes must indeed be laid why not lay large ones and let those people living alongside them connect into them. And as it is downhill from the Market to the Great Bridge all that line of streets could be supplied at moderate charge – at least that's what Thomas Hallack proposes.

"Meanwhile most people rely on bore holes, private and public pumps and overflowing wells which get their water thanks to the peculiarity of the lower green or iron-sand strata under Cambridge. The water dips under the gault and above the Oxford clay then rises up under pressure causing useful and ornamental fountains. Outside Cambridge there are artesian springs at Barton, Wimpole and Madingley but the water from the bore in King Street is purer than most.

"The colleges have their own pumps which constantly need repair. Caius has three, one in Gonville Court, one by the kitchen and another in Tree Court, which is the one the bedmakers use for drawing the water for washing and drinking. The odd thing is that there's a privy, in full use, standing in the corner of a garden just the other side of that wall! They keep a pump-mender on the staff at regular wages to keep them working".

But the danger was theft. John Ayres from Castle End woke up one morning and went out to the pump for a wash – only there was no water. There was not even a pump – it had gone with just a stump of pipe sticking up from the ground. A bit later that day a rag-and-bone merchant in Barnwell, named Foote, was approached by a labourer who offered to sell him a pump. Well he'd got some tale about how he'd come by it, but Foote was suspicious. He told the chap to call again next morning and then started to make some enquiries and found it had been stolen. When the man called again he sent for the police but they were so long coming that the bloke got fed up and went way. But Foote followed him and before they'd gone far the constable came and the chap was taken into custody. He got nine month's hard labour for his troubles.

If he'd wanted to steal lead he should have pinched it from the colleges: some of them have the oldest downpipes in the country. Well it stands to reason that rain pouring off the roof of King's College chapel would have hit the roofs of the side chapels with so much force that it would have soon damaged them. The second court of St John's built between 1599 and 1602 possesses some of the earliest surviving rain-water heads in Cambridge and there are more in the lane to the kitchens from St John's street to the river. If they got pinched after the university has shut down for the summer it would be months before anybody noticed. They'd

probably have to turn back to those old engravings by David Loggan to remind themselves where they were – but have you noticed how the old pipes all stopped short ten feet from the ground with the water deflected from the walls by a short length of pipe bent at an obtuse angle? That at least is something that's changed.

613

The name 'Angelo' had occurred more than once during Pickwick's brief Cambridge visit. Could this be Dominico, the famous fencer who had achieved such a wide reputation for his skill, bringing himself to the attention of the Earl of Pembroke, Duke of Devonshire and King George III and IV themselves when Prince of Wales. If so what was he doing in Cambridge?

As ever Elliott Smith had the answer: Angelo had opened a school in Soho where he trained generations of wealthy English youth in fencing and horsemanship. Then he'd decided to send his son, Henry, to pay visits to both the Universities where many rich young men were anxious to continue the training they'd already received at Harrow and other schools.

However Henry had not found it easy to gain acceptance here. When he first came up to Cambridge in 1806 he had been anxious to find somewhere appropriate for his meetings. Having surveyed all the options he had approached the Mayor for permission to use the Town Hall, only to be met been met with outright refusal. So he had turned to one of his old pupils, Lord Byron, who was then attending Trinity College.

Byron had been indignant at the insolent conduct of the Mayor and promised his backing to ensure that his application would be successful. He first approached the Master of Trinity on Angelo's behalf only to find that the Master had a personal dispute with the mayor and had to decline his assistance. However the Vice Chancellor, whose authority was paramount, was approached, and Byron promised to speak to all his friends in an endeavour to bend the obstinacy of the upstart magistrate who seemed equally deficient in justice and common civility, adding "believe me, we will yet humble this impertinent bourgeois"

In this he was obviously successful for Henry had given instruction in the Guildhall till last year, after which he'd moved to the Black Bear in Market Street where on Monday, Tuesday and Wednesday he continued to teach fencing and the broadsword.

But it had not been not all plain sailing. Angelo usually travelled down overnight by the Lynn coach driven by Thomas Cross. It left London about six in the evening and arrived in Cambridge at one next morning. He invariably stayed at the Rose Inn where a supper and bed were always ready for him – except on one occasion.

The Union coach unloaded at the White Horse where the passengers usually took supper. The innkeeper - an ill-looking fellow, very much scarified with the small-pox- was too civil by half, and at first was very officious in helping passengers out of the coach. But as he had prepared for Angelo's reception, he was much disappointed when he did not sup at his house, and voiced his displeasure when he found he was going to the Rose.

However when Henry got to his inn on that cold, damp, foggy night, the second week in December, he rang at the gate repeatedly but received no answer. So he went to the Hoop in Bridge Street, and then to the Bear, but whether the people were asleep, or it was too late to be bothered, nobody would give him lodgings. In desperation he returned to the White Horse but by then the other passengers having supped and left, it being two o'clock and his family going to bed, the landlord refused him either supper or lodging, impudently telling him to be

off and make himself scarce. Seeing a fire in the kitchen Henry begged to be allowed to remain there, but was shown to the door.

Shut out, he had wandered all night in the cold, and in no place could he find shelter, the rain occasionally falling, until about six o'clock the mail coach from London arrived at the Eagle and Child, where at last a door was opened into the inn yard. Shivering with cold, he was glad to blow the kitchen fire whilst the chambermaid prepared a bed for him. After three hours' sleep Angelo had hastened to Dighton's the college bookseller and procured Burn's 'Justice', which stated that no innkeeper could refuse a night's lodgings to a traveller. He went to the Guildhall to complain to the mayor, Mr Mortlock. But despite being a regular hirer of the large hall, all he could get from him was that he might go to the assizes for all he cared!

614

Cambridge's reputation for being an unwelcoming town was one that Pickwick could endorse from his personal experiences. Yet his own accommodation at the Castle Inn also proved that there were good places to stay, and kind people to compensate for the others.

So it had been for fencing master Henry Angelo. For having endured one night of wandering the streets seeking any smouldering fireside, the next evening he'd been overwhelmed with hospitality.

First he'd been invited by one of his old fencing pupils, Lord Altamont, to dine with him at Jesus College, and though harassed and fatigued Angelo could not refuse the honour. But then several of his former scholars from Harrow School had called to say their annual meeting was that day being held at the Hoop Hotel in Bridge Street and they expected him to join them there. He could not afford to disappoint either, so accepted both.

The assembly in his Lordship's rooms included several noblemen, one of whom, Marquis Spineto, had been interpreter at the late Queen Caroline's trial and had many a racy tale to tell of goings-on in the highest of society. Angelo had found it most difficult to extricate himself from the table, but Altamont appreciated the importance of the Harrow meeting, and good-naturedly permitted him to leave soon after dinner was concluded.

Then Angelo had made his way down Jesus Lane, where he avoided the drunken approaches of Jemmy Gordon, and presented himself back at the Hoop. This was one of the inns that had failed to respond to his plea to be allowed to warm his frozen bones just a few hours earlier. Now it was different: the landlord was welcoming and although dinner had been over some time would have willingly rekindled the kitchen stove and set the cook back to work. Especially when he realised this young man was to be guest of honour at the Harrowvian gathering. By then the glass had pretty freely gone round several times and all were in good humour, heightened by cheerful songs and animated recollection of schoolboy days.

Angelo was placed between the President, Edward Blackburn, and the Duke of Devonshire, who when Lord Hartington had learned his skill with the foil from him. Now the Duke was deaf though this did not prevent him calling for one of Angelo's songs and pretending to enjoy it. Nor did it prevent others in the party setting out to get his Grace thoroughly drunk, without appreciating that his lifetime's training was quite adequate to match their own capacity in that regard.

But the most pleasant of his companions had been his long-time friend, Lord Byron, then on the vegetable system, for he ate nothing else. Byron had been his scholar when not more than twelve years old and although he had not continued the sport whilst up at Cambridge, always

welcomed his old fencing master to his rooms at Trinity. And it was Byron who ensured Angelo's departure was far more comfortable than his welcome had been.

Henry had booked a seat on the evening mail departing from the Eagle and Child Inn. As he prepared to leave Byron decided to see him to the last, and getting up from table escorted him to Bene't Street.

On arrival they found that there was only an outside place left and, somewhat unsteadily, Angelo clambered aboard. Fearing his friend faced a cold journey Byron sent to St John 's College for the good beer it was noted for, and filling a tumbler handed it up himself to the astonishment of the innkeeper who, recognising his Lordship, wondered why he should be waiting so attentively on an outside passenger. Then it was Byron who with a loud huzza cheered off the coach as it made its way through the night to London.

615

George Gordon, Lord Byron, had paid careful attention to the comfort of his old school fencing master for he revived memories of an earlier happier time when the future had seemed bright – the future seemed Oxford.

Byron had not wanted to come to Cambridge University for all his old Harrow school friends had chosen the other place. But the only Oxford college that he would be prepared to attend was Christ Church, and they would have nothing of this rich young nobleman.

So Cambridge it had to be, and of all the colleges it must be Trinity, where previous Byrons had gone before him. At least it got him away from home and the attention of his mother. And his mother made sure he did not want for anything.

He received a generous allowance and was able to afford superexcellent rooms in the heart of the college. Of course they needed to be redecorated to reflect his own taste; they were papered and painted and the old furniture discarded to be replaced by a large four-poster bed. Then he had somewhere to entertain, flanked on one side by his Tutor and on the other by a venerable fellow, neither of whom appreciated being disturbed by raucous revelry

But that was what college was about. On arrival Bryon immediately sent out an order for the necessities of life: four dozen bottles of wine and twelve bottles each of the best port, sherry, claret and Madeira. For he had to follow the example he was being set by the Professors – or at least Professor Porson- 'I never can recollect him except as drunk, or brutal or usually both'. Nor was he alone: the Master eats, drinks and sleeps, the Fellows drink, dispute and pun, he claimed

Byron was a nobleman and as such he was treated. He had no need to join the mad crush of students scrambling into the dining room to fight their way to the juiciest joint set out on the long lines of tables, for University Noblemen joined the drunken dons on their top table. But this was not for him: most evenings Byron dined in private splendour or at numerous parties and dinners– such as the one he had shared with Angelo

Not for him either the standard academic attire. His Nobleman's gown was richly embroidered and topped with a gold-tasselled mortar board for formal occasions; for most days however this was replaced with a black top hat – only Byron decided to swap it for a white one, just to be different.

Nor did a Nobleman need to worry about such niceties as attending lectures; he just had to stay a minimum number of terms and then, whilst his contemporaries were struggling to prepare for examinations

There, in apartments small and damp
The candidate for college prizes
Sits poring by the midnight lamp;
Goes late to bed, yet early rises

all he would be required to do was a token two-minute 'disputation', followed of course by a handsome fee to the examiner.

So freed from such cares, all that was left was enjoyment. Byron had an allowance of £500 a year, a servant and – most importantly – his horse, Oateater: not for him the round of livery stables seeking a spirited steed, rather than the knock-kneed nags that were often for hire. It should have been a time of fun: "This place is wretched enough – a villainous chaos of din and drunkenesss, nothing but hazard and burgundy, hunting, mathematics and Newmarket, riot and racing …."

However Byron was not happy. He had no real friends and decided to quit Cambridge. Only then he found someone special: "the smile none else might understand … the pressure of the thrilling hand … the kiss, so guiltless and refined …. those eyes proclaimed so pure a mind". And they met whilst swimming.

616

Lord Byron's stay at Cambridge would have been particularly dull if he had not acted in contravention of the rules. For it was part of Cambridge etiquette one might meet a good fellow at a wine party, crack a joke with him and hob-nob convivially. But unless one had been formally introduced you were stared at with the most vacant wonderment if you actually attempted to recognise the chap the next day.

Thus if a don walking on the banks of the Cam were to fall into the river and be drowning when another Fellow came up, then his response would be "What a pity it is that I have not the honour of knowing the gentleman, that I might save him!"

However in Byron's case it was not a Fellow that he rescued from a watery grave but a Trinity college choirboy. John Edleston was of very fair complexion with dark eyes, light locks and a very fine voice. After their initial, damp, introduction the two met every day, summer and winter throughout the rest of his Cambridge stay, without passing one tiresome moment and separated each time with increasing reluctance.

It was at this time that a poem appeared in *Monthly Literary Recreations*. It was unsigned but many in Cambridge had no doubt as to its authorship. Entitled *Stanzas to Jessy* it read:

There is a Form on which these eyes
Have fondly gazed with such delight,
By day, that Form their joy supplies,
And Dreams restore it, through the night.

There is a Voice whose tones inspire
Such softened feelings in my breast,
I would not hear a Seraph Choir,
Unless that voice could join the rest.

There is a Face whose blushes tell
Affection's tale upon the cheek,
But pallid at our fond farewell,
Proclaims more love than words can speak.

There is a Lip, which mine has prest,
But none had ever prest before;
If vowed to make me sweetly blest,
That mine alone should press it more.

Byron's mother noticed a rapid increase in his already extravagant spending as he lavished gifts and money on the lad. She was forced to remonstrate, but instead her son went to the money-lenders to finance his time through college. Not that he intended to stay very long - one term was quite sufficient: he'd wanted to go to Oxford and he just could not settle in this damp place by the fens, he told her. Only by threatening to cut off his allowance altogether was he forced back to his studies – or at least his Cambridge extravagances.

His bills increased, his weight increased, and also did his circle of admirers. One was William Bankes, another an old Harrow schoolmate, Edward Noel Long. They rode together, lounged together, spent their evenings playing music and long hot days swimming in a secluded pool behind Grantchester mill where the water was deep enough for diving. From its depths they retrieved plates, eggs and shillings – all of which they had thrown in especially. Though why Byron bothered to save shillings while squandering sovereigns it was hard to say.

He invested in a carriage-and-four with attendants in full livery, he further improved and redecorated his already lavish accommodation, he invited his London friends to visit and dine. But it was not enough: he did not like the Cambridge dons, especially Professor Porson

Dull as the pictures that adorn their halls,
They think all learning fixed within their walls:
In manner rude, in foolish forms precise,
All modern arts affecting to despise
Yet prizing Bentley's, Bronck's or Porson's note,
More than the verse on which the critic wrote

After one perfect summer term he took the rest of the year off, travelling with his friends to the seaside and then to a rented house. He endeavoured to lose weight and started seriously to write poetry satirising academic life on the banks of the Granta. Back at Trinity the dons were concerned: Byron had a fine set of rooms that were not being occupied, could he at least clear out his belongings and let somebody else have them.

617

Lord Henry Byron came to Cambridge one last time, just before the end of term 1807, to clear out his things. His room at Trinity College had already been occupied by somebody else, though they're been warned not to make any changes or even touch any of his possessions as His Lordship – or rather his mother – was still technically paying for them.

He made his final journey a fitter, slimmer man than he'd left University – in fact he'd changed so much that even his very best friend, Edleston did not recognise him. He too was due to leave, as were a couple of other friends so Byron decided to organise one last party, a proper farewell.

He made arrangements at the Hoop Hotel for a last supper for fourteen people, where twenty-three bottles of wine were consumed as each ate and drank their way through a guinea's worth of the finest fare that Cambridge could offer.

Only then he changed his mind. For he was now a poet: his first volume of verse had been published and everybody – except Porson and the other Trinity dons – were delighted to tell him how wonderful they were. And there was another reason: the young man who had been occupying his room. Charles Matthews was a scholar, a wit, and a man who shared Byron's passions for the male form. He also had a friend, almost named after the river. John Cam Hobhouse had never previously had time for the fashionable eccentricities of his lordship. But now Byron was a poet, well that made a difference.

Before the new term started there was another volume on the bookstalls and a novel on the way. He churned out more and more verse in between gambling, hunting, horseracing at Newmarket and organising parties for jockeys, parsons and other poets.

He also made new acquaintances, including an Old Etonian Fellow of King's, Scrope Davies, who was addicted to gambling and, despite sometimes having a chamber-pot stuffed full of banknotes, was to ruin himself in the end.

Another was somewhat hairier than the rest and with far less breeding. It was a tame bear that followed him around like a dog. It was the first of a collection of monkeys, mastiffs, geese, cats and peacocks but was not welcomed in Trinity – even dogs were banned – so Byron found it lodgings in the stables at the Ram Yard, just behind the Round Church, where it dined on bread and milk.

Byron finished his 'studies' at Christmas 1807, returning to collect his honorary degree the following July. Next year he reached the grand old age of 21 and took his took his seat in the House of Lords before embarking with his old college chum, Hobhouse, on a grand European tour. They visited Greece and Constantinople where he swam the Hellespont, finding it somewhat different from the pool at Grantchester which was now being named after him. His friends were less gifted when it came to swimming, two drowned, one in the Cam, the other in a Portuguese shipwreck.

It was a period when death seemed all round. His mother died, two Harrow schoolfriends died, even his much-loved former choirboy, John Edleston died. He wrote to his former Trinity tutor: "Every thing about & concerning me wears a gloomy aspect, still I keep up my spirit, it may be broken but it shall never be bent. I heard of a death the other day that shocked me more than any of the preceding, of one whom I once loved more than I ever loved a living thing, & one who I believe loved me to the last, yet I had not a tear left for an event which five years ago would have bowed me to the dust; still it sits heavy on my heart & calls back what I wish to forget, in many a feverish dream. . . ."

But Trinity was itself reeling from the tragic death of one of Byron's critics: Professor Porson.

618

Professor Porson was far more famous at Cambridge than any poetic minor Lord like Byron.

Pickwick had already heard how this Norfolk weaver's son had made his way to Eton and Cambridge University where he'd been elected Regius Professor of Greek even though the stipend was so low he could not afford to live there regularly. He'd gained a reputation for drinking and brutality and, like many Bachelor fellows, had taken little care over his personal hygiene or the state of his clothing.

In his later years of life he married a widow and even his wedding day was eccentric. They wed at eight in the morning and parted directly afterwards. He went off to his favourite inn where he stayed until eight the next day. His wife understood his problem and had started to cure him of his worst drinking habits before she died. But it was the circumstances of his death that were so shocking to his academic colleagues.

Porson had left Cambridge to take the post of Principal Librarian at the London Institution where he could make good use of his knowledge of Greek. Then one evening a gentleman, Mr Southall of America Square, was strolling in the Strand when he saw well-dressed person laying on the pavement at the corner of Northumberland Street, apparently in a fit. Nobody else was taking any notice except for a couple of ladies who rubbed his temples and administered a couple of glasses of wine.

Southall went in search of an apothecary who diagnosed it as a hopeless case and said medicine would be wasted. So he sent for a Beadle and had the man carried to St Martin's Watch-house. They would not take him in – they had no accommodation for persons in his situation – and sent him to the Workhouse in Castle Street. Here they met with similar treatment: the Master positively refused to admit either of them

Southall went in search of the top official who was of the opinion the man was much in liquor and would have anything to do with him. But Southall would have none of it: he was a Magistrate and would personally be responsible for any expense incurred.

So the stranger was allowed into the workhouse and carried to the general room that was filled with the detritus of London streets, a scene of wretchedness and misery that not even Boz could have described adequately. His Samaritan objected to him being left in such a place and offered money to anybody prepared to admit him to a more private room. At that the Overseer who gave orders that the gentleman be conveyed to the ward set apart for the married poor.

Here as the officials started to strip him of his blue coat and black breeches they noticed that his gold watch was still in his pocket, together with a quantity of silver. A bedstead was let down on which was placed a decent feather bed and it was in such a situation that the Professor finally came around. But he did not know his name and neither did anybody else. There were no clues as to his identity except for a memorandum book filled with lines of Greek and an algebraic calculation.

Next morning a lad employed at the London Institution noticed that their Librarian was absent. He also saw a story in the newspapers of how a stranger had been found in the street, his pocket full of silver and fragments of Greek. He brought it to the attention of the Clerk and he in turn set about to bring Porson back. As he was helped up the steps the poor Professor was a man transformed: his whole frame was emaciated and enfeebled, his eyes sunk in, his lips black and a death-like hue exhibited in his face. He was a character of absolute wretchedness and misery.

Porson was taken to his rooms where he remained for an hour before surprising his colleagues by walking into the Globe Room and starting to conduct a learned discussion on a Greek inscription with a visiting scholar. But it was obvious that something serious was wrong – he

was unable to translate from Greek to English. It did not stop him going out to dine at the African Coffee House though he had to be helped home to bed where he passed away.

619

Following the death of the Regius Professor of Divinity, and perhaps horrified by his treatment in a London workhouse, Trinity College decided that Professor Porson's funeral should be one to remember.

The London Institution was closed whilst his body was removed, with his library colleagues assisting in the solemnity. The procession that made its way back to Cambridge consisted of the hearse and four mourning coaches. They were followed by six private carriages – and woe betide any turnpike gate keeper who sought to delay its stately passage.

The cortege wound its way down Trumpington Street and Kings Parade to arrive at the Great Gate of Trinity at half-past two in the afternoon. There the coffin was carried into the Hall where it lay in state till the college clock chimed ten times. Then, promptly at five, the Master, the vice master, senior and junior fellows, bachelors of arts, scholars and other members resident in the University, each in their appropriate academical habits with black scarfs, bands and gloves, emerged from the combination room, accompanied by the chief-mourners. After moving round the body, which was placed in the middle of the room where Porson had often wined and dined, they took their seats with the chief mourners being placed on the right hand and left of the Master.

In accordance with custom, several epitaphs in Greek and English verse were placed on the pall where they were read by his former associates in study. Then after the choir had chanted an anthem the body was raised by the bearers, and a most solemn procession made round the great quadrangle to the chapel.

It comprised two porters, the singing men and boys and Mr Wilson the undertaker followed by two pages and a featherlid. Then came Dr Davy the physician, Mr Oakes the apothecary, the Minster of Trinity Church and the college hierarchy together with fellows, scholars and pensioners. In the midst of this profusion of learning walked the somewhat uneasy figures of James Perry and Siday Hawes, Porson's brother-in-law and nephew.

Once inside the college chapel another Anthem was sung and the lesson read before all moved to the grave that had been opened at the foot of the statue of Sir Isaac Newton and surrounded by all of the other illustrious persons the College had produced. It was here the funeral service was conducted - as awful and dignified as any ever witnessed. Nothing could be more solemn and those who displayed the greatest grief and shed the saddest tears were those Fellows who had been so scathing about the Norfolk lad while he had lived. All expressed the irreparable loss that the literary world had suffered through his sad demise. And all feared that there, but for the grace of God, they too might have gone.

One man who was not there was Lord Byron, the poet whose activities had so scandalised Porson and the others. He had little chance of ever being granted such recognition. Yet the two were to be united in a volume of poetry entitled 'The Cambridge Tart' published in 1823 when some experienced difficulties telling whose verse was whose.

One (by Lord Byron) was dedicated to college life:

There, in apartments small and damp,
The candidate for college prizes

Sits pouring by the midnight lamp;
Goes late to bed, yet early rises.

Another, by Porson, to a female servant:

When lovely Susan irons smocks,
No damsel e'er looked neater;
Her eyes are brighter than her box,
And burn me like a heater

While a second by the lamented Regius Professor was poignant in the extreme, recalling happier memories of the London street, where he had been found in the gutter

As I walk'd thro' the Strand so careless and gay,
I met a young girl who was wheeling a barrow,
Choice fruit, Sir, said she, and a bill of the play,
So my apples I bought, and set off for Pizarro.

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'The Cambridge Tart', issued 1823, was a compilation of verse by a variety of Cambridge writers on a variety of issues. Lord Byron himself was one of those featured in a poem entitled 'The Bear and the Bishop.

When Byron was at Trinity –
Studying classics and Divinity – He kept a rugged Russian bear,
Which Bear,
Would often scratch and tear,
And dance and roar, -
So much so, that even men in the adjacent college
Said "within the sphere of their own knowledge,
They never knew so great a bore!"
Indeed the master, then a bishop, was so baited,
He ordered that the beast should quick be sold;
Or if not sold at least translated.

"What", said Lord Byron, "what does the master say?
Send my friend away?
No – give my compliments to Doctor Mansel,
And say, my Bear I certainly can sell;
But 'twill be very hard – for tell him 'Gyp,
The poor thing's sitting for a fellowship"

But while Byron loved his bear, undergraduates in previous centuries had other things on their mind. The Mitre Inn in Bridge Street had been part of the Cambridge scene for centuries, and had gone through some sad times. None was worse than the memorable occasion in 1634 when it fell down – an event recorded by Thomas Randolph in his 'Poem of the Fall of the Mitre Tavern in Cambridge'

Lament, lament, yee schollers all,
Each weare his blackest gowne,
The Mytre that held up your witts
Is now itself fall'n downe.

Some said the cellars had been undermined by the Devil, that he might drink below

"But I thinke that the pope was drunke
And let the myter fall.

There was only one thing to do:

Be not dismay'd at all,
For we will drinke it up againe,
Though we doe catch a fall.

Wee'le be thy workmen day and night,
In spite of bugge-beare proctors,
Before, we dranke like freshmen all,
But now we'll drink like doctors

The Mitre did rise again and attracted students – though some came for more than the beer. The true identity of the 'Pretty Bar-keeper of the Mitre' who caught the eye and prompted the verse of Christopher Smart in 1741 may be long forgotten. But at the time she was an attraction to rival the architecture of King's

No handkerchief her bosom hid,
No tippet from our sight debars
Her heaving breast with moles o'erspread,
Mark'd little hemispheres, with stars;
While on them all our eyes we move,
Our eyes that meant immoderate love.

Many a student tried to woo her with stanzas of verse, with witty conversation. But just as they thought they had succeeded with their suit, they would discover what many a regular had seen so often:

"But hark", she cries, "my mamma calls,"
And straight she's vanish'd from our sight.
While all, sad synod, silent moan,
Both that she went – and went alone

621

There was no doubt that for many a Cambridge Fellow the prospect of a proper home life, away from the incessant annoying discussions over the High Table, was one that appealed. One young bachelor reflected on an alternative lifestyle.

Having attended a ball, where the dancing went on till 'the nodding fiddler hung his weary head' he had retired to his solitary bed and thoughts of his blushing partner, Kate. Eventually sleep came, but it was not a restful night, as he confessed in 'The Cambridge Tart':

I dreamt of mutual love and Hymen's joys,
Of happy moments and connubial bliss;
And then I thought of little girls and boys,
The mother's glances, and the infant's kisses

I saw them all, in sweep perspective, sitting
In winter's eve around a blazing fire,

The children playing and the mother knitting,
Or fondly gazing on the happy sire.

But would married life always be as rosy as he envisaged?

The scene was chang'd: in came the baker's bill:
I started to see the hideous consummation
Of pies and puddings that it took to fill
The bellies of the rising generation.

There was no end to eating – legs of mutton
Were vanish'd daily by this little host:
To see them, you'd have thought each tiny glutton
Had laid a wager who could eat the most.

Nor did the expenses stop there:

Then came the school bill : board and education,
So much per annum : but the extras mounted
To nearly twice the primal stipulation,
And every little bagatelle was counted

Nor was a University education cheap (has his own parents could testify): a new Homer Illias, binding old Virgilius … until

… now I languish'd for the single state,
The social glass, the horse and chaise on Sunday,
The jaunt to Windsor with my sweetheart Kate,
And curs'd again the weekly bills of Monday.

Here Kate began to scold,—I stamp'd and swore,
The kittens squeak, the children loudly scream;
And thus awaking with the wild uproar,
I thanked my stars that it was but a dream.

His wiser contemporaries agreed and informed him that the young lady who had so nearly won his heart and wallet, was one of ten sisters. Their mamma had brought them up to Cambridge specifically to dance with the young gentlemen of the University at parties. But although she persisted for three or four years they each departed as spinsters, though – some said – not all as the innocent maids they had been when they first arrived in town!

622

Squabbles between collegians was one thing – it was known only to a few. But squabbles between members of the county's hierarchy was something else: everybody took an interest.

Especially when the adversaries were Henry John Adeane, MP, Squire of Babraham and Thomas Mortlock of Abington Hall, his near neighbour. Both gentlemen had experienced misfortune recently: Thomas' premises had been attacked by arsonists and Adeane had been struck down and badly injured during the riot at Linton – both of which Pickwick had been appraised of.

The two men found themselves head-to-head in court over two disputes relating to rights of way.

Under the Great Abington Inclosure Act the Commissioners had been authorised to set out new private roads. Old roads were to be stopped up, once a new one had been constructed fit for the passage of cattle and carriages. One of these lay across land in West Field that was allocated to Mortlock. But Adeane was to be guaranteed the right to get to various staunches and sluices on the watercourse that irrigated various meadows he owned.

Mortlock exercised his right to change the road layout in 1804. He abided by the letter of the law and set out a route for Adeane's men to get to the water. However they found this inconvenient and took to climbing over a seven-foot fence as a short cut, so Mortlock fixed nails and spikes to the top to stop them. As a result Adeane took him to court more than 30 years later. The case had already been tried once when the jury was divided, so now a new trial was to be held. There seemed little doubt that the squire of Babraham would be successful.

But why wait so long to take action? The answer may well lie in what had recently occurred nearby. It was much the same sort of thing. A road called Walden Way leading from Fulbourn towards Babraham passed through a plantation on Adeane's land. But in 1825 he'd constructed a new road that bypassed it and encouraged travellers to keep to the alternative route. He had no right to do such a thing and had sought none of the proper authorisation – in fact it was expressly against the law to divert an old highway as a means of stopping it up. Then, ten years later he applied to the magistrates asking them to rule that the old road was unnecessary and formally erase it from the maps

It so happened the magistrates were well known to him and they had no hesitation in agreeing. Whether they actually went to inspect it was open to doubt and even if they had there was nothing to see, as the road had already long been removed.

Then, under the rules and regulations, the magistrates ordered the surveyor of highways at Babraham to sell the soil over which the now replaced road had once run to the adjacent landowner, if he wished to buy it, or to some other persons, for the full value thereof. Now the surveyor of highways for Babraham was Henry John Adeane and the person to whom he was to sell the land was himself. But did Henry the surveyor have to ensure that Henry the purchaser paid the full value – or would that clause only apply if somebody else had bought it?

It all smacked of chicanery and so Thomas Mortlock had complained with the result that the magistrates - Francis Dayrell, the Rev John Addison Carr and George Pearson - were made to answer for their actions at the Cambridgeshire Quarter Sessions in October 1834 – at which Henry John Adeane was chairman. No surprisingly they were exonerated.

But Mortlock was not done. He appealed that decision and sent the matter to the Court of King's Bench. The judges there had been divided – Lord Denman in particular wondering about the probity of the surveyor selling land to himself. However these were matters that should have been sorted out by the lower court and, on a split decision, they decided to take no action. But it did leave a distinct feeling that some people were above the law

623

Disputes over roads were not confined to the largest of the county's landowners. A few years earlier, in 1806, the few inhabitants of Bartlow and the many dons of Cambridge had been enthralled by a dispute that broke out between the village parson and the University Professor of Anatomy.

The Rev Joseph Hall had lived in harmony in his peaceful parish nestling under the giant Bartlow Hills since 1782 before Professor Busick Harwood became tenant of Bartlow Hall alongside and decided to divert a footpath that ran across his grounds, moving it somewhat nearer the rectory. The Rector objected, saying it would encourage people to look into his garden. But Harwood moved it over ten feet anyway. He also planted trees and erected unsightly fences which obstructed a view of a rivulet and the adjacent grounds from the windows and gardens of the parsonage. Then – according to the rector – he strung up a skeleton to provide him with an alternative prospect.

At this rector was prompted to vent his spleen in a letter: "Sir – if 'Do as you would be done by' was inscribed on the fences you have erected they would be more obnoxious to you than they are to me. But this is paying you too high a compliment; for it is supposing you retain some sense of religion".

Then the Reverend got more carried away: "Your conduct is founded on malignity: it neither resembles that of a Christian or a Gentleman. You stand convicted, by the verdict of everyone who has observed your behaviour, of the meanest conduct. Your very workmen blush for you, the passing villager speaks with contempt of you, and the traveller sighs for you. Everybody should unite against such a tyrant. Walk over your projected Elysium and look at your works; but you will not, like your Creator, be able to pronounce them good."

Then he added a threat: "Schemes of reprisal have been shewn to me, one of which is calculated to destroy the beauty of your grounds; but I hope I shall be able to resist the temptation, for I cannot wish to imitate your example. When in the course of your rounds I shall accidentally attract your notice, you may correctly say 'I have done that man all the injury I can'. If ever you should be in want of bread, I will have no difficulty in denying it to you".

The Rector returned a portrait of the Professor that had been given to him, saying "I can no longer contemplate it as that of a friend". When it was carefully studied some words were visible beneath the varnish. They read: "I will not harbour such a drunken beast".

But when Busick Harwood instigated legal proceedings, the parson tried to retract. He wrote offering to make a candid apology and to pay the costs of the prosecution. He also claimed that the words on the painting had not been written by him but by the Professor himself, and were intended to satirize the artist who had given something of the character of intoxication to the portrait, which did not belong to the sitter. This may have been the last straw, for Busick was passionately fond of his portraits: he'd patronised a water-colour painter name Farmer and had urged all his acquaintances of whatever age or situation to sit for him since the charge was moderate and the likenesses very striking. But they had declined, so he'd bought several of himself instead.

Now he would not be placated. The matter went to court. The Professor agreed that he had erected a skeleton – but it was not meant to terrify people from continuing to use the old path and force them down the new one, it was there as a kind of bugbear to frighten the thieves who had robbed his garden. And anyway he'd taken it down the next day – given the shortage of bodies for anatomists to work on a skeleton was too valuable an object to be hung in a garden. The court came it its conclusion and fined the Rector as a punishment.

But perhaps there'd been another reason Harwood had wanted to clear his name, for a few weeks later came the news that he'd been awarded a Knighthood. It was a fitting climax to an amazing career.

Sir Busick Harwood was not a man to argue with, as the Rector of Bartlow had discovered. Born in Newmarket, he'd been apprenticed to a local apothecary but after a few years disagreeing with his master had left him and gone to London where passed an examination as a surgeon before getting an appointment in the Indian Medical Service in Bengal.

There he treated the fabulously-rich Nabob of Oudh who had been wounded in the eye and had been well-rewarded for his medical skills. These were further honed by his surgical exertions following a particularly bloody battle which left many wounded with a fighting chance of recovery but him exhausted. With his health impaired he'd left India and returned to England in 1778 where the fortune he'd amassed with such trouble was swindled from him.

Not one to be beaten he entered himself as a Fellow-Commoner at Christ's College, though now a much more advanced age than usual, to take a degree in medicine His misfortunes and the spirit with which he rose above them added to his practical skill in medicine, his knowledge of anatomy and his interesting accounts of the remote countries in which he had lived, worked their magic and in due course became a physician at Addenbrooke's Hospital where he specialised in blood transfusion.

Awards were soon forthcoming and he was chosen as University Professor of Anatomy on the death of Charles Collignon. But his lectures in the University Medical School were sparsely attended – very few chose to read medicine and those that did seldom bothered to attend lectures.

One exception was John Elliotson who recalled how interesting they were: Harwood used to show the process of incubation by having twenty-one eggs of different ages so as to see them crack. Then when the time came for Elliotson to take a degree he'd read aloud a thesis he'd composed in Latin to Professor Harwood who tendered two of three objections – also in Latin, which had to be answered. Then roles were reversed. There was no other examination or test of his proficiency in medical studies.

Harwood fought for the strict enforcement of the regulations governing the award of the degree in medicine and raised the problem with Sir Lucas Pepys, president of the Royal College of Physicians, hoping that he also would exert pressure for reform. But Sir Isaac Pennington, the college's Regius Professor of medicine, managed to block change as it was he who awarded the MD degree. Things got so heated that Harwood even challenged Pennington to a duel - which he wisely refused to accept.

In Cambridge Harwood continued his surgical course and expanded the anatomical museum, purchasing some specimens and producing others himself. The museum was open to anybody who attended the lectures. Dissection was another thing. There was a room in the old anatomy school but it was becoming increasingly difficult to get sufficient bodies. Even when there was a fresh corpse very few students came to watch the public dissections, so Harwood gave up doing them. It did give him more time to research on transfusing blood from sheep to dogs and to publish detailed works on the brain and smell.

By now he had other things on his mind. He'd experienced the trauma of switching colleges to Emmanuel, where he enjoyed a better apartment, a nicer garden and the friendship of the Master, the Rev Dr Farmer. Almost as bad he'd surrendered his bachelorship, having married, though there were no children to distract him. His wife, Elizabeth, was a somewhat corpulent woman who shared his enjoyment of a pipe of tobacco whilst they lay in bed – a scene satirised in a print by James Gilray issued in 1810.

Both Buswick Harwood, University Professor of Anatomy and his wife loved both a pipe of tobacco and good food. He purchased a house adjoining his garden at Emmanuel College where he employed a man-servant and entertained lavishly, often recruiting his guests during his morning walk.

Dinner was served up at two o'clock and the varied menu once included a turbot which looked very similar to one that had been displayed in the anatomy department the previous day. These meals were sober affairs, for Harwood had to lecture immediately afterwards and those who dined with him were expected to earn their meal by boosting the number who attended. However his wine parties were something else; then liquor flowed and the conversation often verged on the libellous.

While Busick Harwood antagonised his colleagues and neighbours, the University of Cambridge had been squabbling with the descendents of Sir George Downing over his inheritance. Eventually they had been successful in securing the funding for a new College that was now growing in the Pembroke Leys just to the south of the town.

It needed a master and who better than Francis Annesley. True he was not a member of the University, nor did he have any experience of academic life. But he did have two great attributes: he was a Member of Parliament and – more importantly - the great grandson of the first Sir George Downing with family connections to the Cotton family. He proved an inspired choice and spent many years battling legal challenges before Downing College was finally up and running.

Amongst its initial appointments was a Professor of Medicine and the best man for that job was Busick Harwood. However as University professor of anatomy, Busick was far too busy to spend much time in the administrative wrangles before his large new home, East Lodge, was ready for his occupation. As soon as it was completed he moved in - which provoked a great squabble with the other new Professorship, that of Law who was incensed that his own lodge had not even been started. Edward Christian was a constitutional lawyer and Chief Justice for the Isle of Ely, he too had little time for college business and became increasingly cantankerous as the years passed.

The other new appointments were also less than anxious to help with all the paperwork. One was William Meeke, an MP and barrister, who did not even attend the laying of the foundation stone. He claimed he was ill, in fact he was married which meant he was no longer qualified to hold the position of Fellow. He kept his wedding quiet for six months before the news leaked out and he was forced to resign. His replacement was a man devoted to boxing and swimming who drowned himself in Byron's Pool

All this added pressures on to the Master Annesely. He continued to battle the various challenges whilst at the same time serving as Member of Parliament for Reading until the election of 1806 when, at 72 years of age, he felt he'd had enough. At least now he could concentrate on the college where one Fellow was doing his best to help.
William Frere, a lawyer, was entrusted with the job of getting the college a coat of arms, he composed the Latin oration at the foundation stone ceremony and arranged the first Fellowship examinations. He would have been an ideal successor as Master was it not for Miss Mary Dillingham. For she won his heart and when they married, Frere resigned his Fellowship. Thus when Francis Annesley died at his Mayfair home in 1812 there was no obvious successor. Lady Harwood decided that her masterful husband, Busick, was the man for the Mastership.

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As the newly-established Downing College descended into civil war as to who was to become its new Master, Busick Harwood was convinced that he was the man.

His main rival was Edward Christian, the Downing Professor of the Laws of England, Professor of General Polity in the East India College and Commissioner of Bankrupts. He had forced through the Copyright Act that demanded that copies of every work printed in the British dominions were to be deposited at Stationers' Hall – something regarded by publishers as a heavy tax upon Literature – and ensured that his own numerous publications were filling the shelves of libraries throughout the land. But he was not popular even with his colleagues in the College, and with Downing struggling to survive it would need all the support it could get

The college rules meant that there would only be a small number of candidates: only past and present members of the Governing Body were eligible to stand and two of these were far too young and inexperienced to be considered. The main contenders beside Harwood and Christian were John Lens, a successful lawyer and two who had sacrificed the college for love. Both William Meeke and William Frere, the man who'd been groomed for the Mastership, had married and found other things to interest themselves in. But both were now ready to try their luck.

The choice would be made by four electors, Dr Torkington the Master of Clare Hall, Dr Craven the Master of St John's and two Archbishops – Dr Sutton from Canterbury and Dr Harcourt of York. If they were split then the casting vote would be given by the College Visitor, the Lord Chancellor, Lord Eldon

Lady Harwood was quickly on the rounds. She started with the Master of Clare and quickly gained an assurance that he would back her husband, who was his friend as well as his doctor. The Master of St John's would also be likely to support Busick which meant that with the vote of just one of the Archbishops, the job would be his.

William Frere started his campaign at Lambeth Palace but got no promises there so he moved on to Clare where Torkington told him he was quite undecided – despite his promise to Lady Harwood. Then at St John's Dr Craven, said he was backing Busick – as anybody would be better than the Professor of Laws.

However Professor Christian was sure that Craven would vote for him and he had, according to gossip, got the backing of the Visitor. Nobody knew which way the Archbishop of York would vote so, against all the odds, it seemed he would get in via the back door. This was not something that Busick could stomach: he could not continue at Downing were his arch-rival successful. The only way to stop him was to sacrifice his wife's ambitions and urge his own main supporter, Torkington, to back William Frere instead

The election was held at Lambeth Palace, but only two of the four voters were present. Instead Professor Christian turned up carrying a note from the Master of St Johns which backed him and Frere had a similar piece of paper from the Master of Clare recording a vote for himself. It was then a nervous wait while the two Archbishops decided who would be the better of the two candidates. They were unanimous in their choice: William Frere was the man to lead the college into the future. It was however not the end.

Christian was not Professor of Laws for nothing; he issued a legal challenge complaining that the election should have taken place in Cambridge and that the vote was void. That meant the

Visitor had to adjudicate, giving him time to further his cause. Several times he called at Clare to seek a meeting with the Master who was then in a poor state of health and confined to his bed. But he would not be bullied. When the vote was taken a second time the result was different – this time nobody backed Christian.
But he still refused to accept the verdict and lodged a petition, ensuring that a very protracted, upsetting and public hearing would have to be convened. It all took time and it was two years after the death of Downing's first Master that they learned who was to be the second. The new man was confirmed as William Frere. It was a choice that saved the college from disaster and saw a remarkable woman in the lodge.

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Mary Frere, the wife of the new Master of Downing College, was the daughter of Brampton Gurdon Dillingham, a wealthy Norfolk squire who had attended Clare Hall back in the 1750s before settling back in the family home at Letton Hall where he did what was expected of him. He'd been appointed Sheriff and spent a great deal of time executing criminals. Such public spectacles had become quite frivolous affairs but he imposed a proper solemnity to the occasion.

Mary was a woman who was as happy and accomplished with a gun in a wood as with a piano in a drawing room. She had a love of music, about which she knew more than anybody else in Cambridge, with a voice of such splendid quality that she was considered the best non-professional singer in the country. She was frequently encouraged to exercise her talents at receptions throughout the University. But all this entertaining added to her husband's workload and, apparently overcome with fatigue, he slept through an address by the Archbishop of Canterbury – one of the men who had gained him his post – and even fell flat on his face in the middle of the room during a lecture on geology, to the great delight of the rest of those attending – he'd been snoring loudly for some time

The Downing College Lodge became a centre of culture with parties and plays to which the college's tenants together with their servants and even tradespeople were invited. It was the obvious place for the celebrated Mrs Siddons to stay after she had given a public performance of Shakespeare – though when pressed to reprise the 'dagger' scene from Macbeth in their drawing room she did somewhat spoil the climax when she mistook her spectacle case for the deadly weapon.

Mary Frere was also keen on gardening and set about transforming the college grounds, planting trees and laying out paths. But the death of Busick Harwood provided her with a problem. The Professor of Anatomy, their near neighbour, had asked in his will to be laid to rest in the college chapel. But the college had not actually got around to erecting one. They did know where it was to be sited so Frere sought permission from the Bishop of Ely for a portion of the ground to be consecrated and an underground vault constructed. Here Busick was laid to rest in the bosom of his college to await, if not resurrection, at least the company of future generations of dons. However the precarious state of college finances meant that even now the chapel had failed to materialise and the only indication of his resting place was a yellowing patch of fading grass visible during summer months.

On the largely empty Downing site the Master soon had a flower garden well supplied with shrubs. But Mary wanted more; after Busick died she took over the East Lodge garden and planted it with trees. Soon the few Fellows were complaining about her plans to reduce their own garden space by moving one of the few brick walls that had actually been built. They were successful – but only because it would have meant moving the privies as well. In consultation with the architect, Wilkins, new avenues of limes were laid to improve the view and some of the old fences that had crossed the site when it had been common land were removed. They were replaced with others so that Mrs Frere's sheep could wander over more

of the surrounding grassland. Once more the Fellows objected: other colleges had ornamental gardens to enjoy, not farmyards.

Matters came to a head when news leaked out of a secret agreement the Master had made to build a house on college land in Regent Street for his wife's recently-widowed mother. It was time for Frere to consult his colleagues – even if most of them were always absent – rather than decide every thing himself. It was surely time that Downing also took undergraduates and became a fully-fledged member of the University with essentials such as a chapel – and a home for the Professor of Laws

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Professor Edward Christian had caused Downing College a very great deal of agitation; his continual moans about not having a large lodging had been one thing, his fight to be elected as its Master was another. But it was his continued dispute once he had been rejected that had caused the greatest expense and animosity

Even after he conceded defeat he went back on his old hobby horse – lack of suitable accommodation. But the Governing Body had had enough; they gave Busick Harwood's East Lodge to the new Professor of Medicine and so ensured that Christian stayed away from college meetings, though he continued to whinge until finally he got his mansion

By then the Professor of Laws was a somewhat pathetic sight wandering around Cambridge and managing to empty street after street, his academic colleagues avoiding him whenever possible. However Elliott Smith had made his acquaintance and could not help feeling sympathy for this lonely figure, a man who had tried very hard in many ways but who often found things conspiring against him

Before he had embarked on his fight to become Master of Downing, Christian had been engaged in another epic struggle, this time for the position of Registrar of the Bedford Level Corporation, the body responsible for maintaining the drainage of the fens.

There had been one opponent for the post, William Saffery, a Downham Market solicitor. Once the votes had been counted each claimed that he had won, but Christian was the first to act on his belief. He made his way to the Fen Office in the Inner Temple in London, where the records were kept, and barricaded himself in, boarding up the windows and doors. For some days he was in control, until other business forced him to leave the building to the care of his clerks.

As soon as his back was turned, Saffery seized his opportunity; when Christian returned to his chambers a few hours later he was refused entry. There then followed legal threats of a type with which Downing Fellows were to become very familiar, until the Professor adjourned to a near-by coffee-house for the night.

Next morning he was all sweetness and light; all he wanted now was the opportunity to remove his personal papers from the Corporation desk. It took some time negotiating - Christian in the street, Saffery with his head sticking out of an upstairs window - before this request was conceded, on the promise that Christian would leave immediately afterwards. Surely the word of the Professor of Laws of England could be relied upon?

Saffery was not so sure; he opened the door very carefully to discover that there was not just one man there, but four – and three of them were most powerful and muscular figures.

Solicitors and their clerks were then entertained by the sight of a struggle that resulted in Christian managing to get his head inside the hall, but with the door closed about his neck. Eventually he begged to be allowed to withdraw, literally. This was conceded, though his hat was retained as a trophy. It was of course not the end, there was a recount – Saffery 82 votes, Christian 81 votes – and several legal wrangles before the Downing man admitted defeat.

Not all of his trials ended in failure: some ended in flogging and even hanging. For Christian was not unsuccessful in everything he did. As well as a Professor and a lawyer, he was a Judge and was appointed by the notorious Bishop Sparke as Chief Justice of the Isle of Ely in 1800. This gave him ample opportunity to think law, practice law and preach law at the poor unfortunate souls condemned to hear his 'Charge' to the Grand Juries. In his latter days it had been memories of some of these cases that he had been delighted to share.

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The legal situation in the Isle of Ely had changed considerably in recent years, Elliott Smith explained. The old Bishop's Gaol in Ely's Market Street had been replaced with a new one at Wisbech and a new court house and Shire Hall had opened on the Lynn Road, Ely, in October 1821.
The first of the General Quarter Sessions of the Peace in that new building had been conducted by Sir Henry Bate Dudley – the hated smasher of the Littleport rioters of whom Pickwick had heard much. He'd administered justice his way, imposing six months solitary confinement on Robert Crofts for thieving some beans out of a lighter, locking up Elizabeth Young for twelve months for stealing a Wesley's Hymn Book and transporting John Newbound and Ambrose Burrows for life for pinching some wool out of a barn

Then once the building was up-and-running it had been time for Lord Chief-Justice Edward Christian to attend for the first Commission of Assize.

Things were tense as Ely prepared for the judge – they always were when Christian was in the city, for memories linger long in the fens. The Cathedral was made ready for a service and George Miller, the Minor Canon, prepared his discourse knowing that however long he droned on, the Judge would take much longer over his address in the new court building immediately afterwards.

The procession from the magnificent cathedral to Charles Humfrey's magnificent new white porticoed Shire Hall building passed without disturbance. During his charge to the Grand Jury the Chief Justice praised the elegance and beauty of the structure, as well as the commodious arrangements which had been made for facilitating public business.

All this was little relevance to Edward Harrison, the first prisoner to appear. He was charged with having broken into the dwelling house of Joseph Barker, of Newton, in the Isle of Ely, farmer, and with having stolen thereout divers articles. The full value of what he'd taken amounted to only two shillings but it was enough to see him transported for seven years. If that sum had been two pounds he would have been hung – that was the law. But even Christian had noted how sympathetic juries tried very hard to play down the cost of stolen items, once valuing a ten pound note at thirty-nine shillings so as to try and save the criminal's life

Some lives had to be forfeited: William Grey had stolen a mare – Guilty – Death. Thomas Warren was indicted for stealing a gelding - Guilty – Death. It was all ordinary enough stuff for the Downing Professor of Laws

But hanging was not the only good use for a rope. John Coulson was indicted for stealing a fowl from Jacob Dobson of March. He was found Guilty and sentenced to be taken from Ely

to the new Wisbech House of Correction and, en route, he was to be whipped beside the road at March. Joseph Salisbury was indicted for stealing a pair of breeches from a hedge-row at Chatteris; he would be taken to Wisbech gaol and whipped publicly at Chatteris along the way. William Stalley had broken into the dwelling-house of John Long, of Witcham Hythe and stolen some silver coins. He was to be publicly whipped at Ely and kept to hard labour in the house of correction at Ely for one month.

Mary Austin got off more lightly; it was claimed she'd stolen some silver coins and a pen-knife from a Whittlesey inn-keeper. However there was no proof that she'd had the money so she got off with just four months' imprisonment at Wisbech, the first and last week in solitary confinement. Sometimes however Christian had a much more interesting case to consider.

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Each crime had its prescribed punishment but until recently the mere intent to murder by administering poison was not a capital offence. That had now been changed by a new Act of Parliament, but it depended on forensic medicine to establish the cause of death and that was a skill only now being developed.

Edward Christian, Downing Professor of the Laws of England and Chief Justice of the Isle of Ely had come across just such a case in 1810. It had excited considerable comment especially as the accused, Michael Whiting, was a Methodist preacher and village shopkeeper in Little Downham, dealing in bread, flour, drugs and other articles. He had married the eldest daughter of a village family whose parents had both died, leaving the three younger children in the care of their housekeeper, Catherine Carter.

It was Catherine who testified how she looked after George, Joseph and Sarah Langman, all minors, and how they had coped quite well until the time came when she had to go away for a day or two, leaving the children to look after themselves. Normally she baked her own bread, but in the hustle of her preparations she'd run out, so had sent Sarah to get some bread from her brother-in-law's shop.

Whiting had come to the house with a loaf shortly afterwards and asked whether they had any flour. Finding they had not he said he would 'send them a little flour and meat to make a pudding with'. despite being told not to bother he was back within the hour carrying a basin containing some flour and pork and had urged Catherine to be sure to make the lads a pudding to sustain them while she was away. He then handed out a few texts of scripture – as he always did - before insisting that Sarah should come and stay with him until the housekeeper got back.

Catherine took some milk and tried to work the flour up into a dumpling. She found it mixed with great difficulty but finally made four, two containing pork, two without. Then she set off on her journey to Chatteris.

About midday George came back to the house, put two of the dumplings into an iron pot with some potatoes and boiled them for dinner. However they tasted so disagreeable that the lads could not eat them. Not wanting to waste food George gave some to a sow in the yard which immediately became sick and soon died. He buried the remaining puddings in the garden. Shortly afterwards both the lads felt very ill with violent pains in the head – in fact Joseph was sick for two or three days.

When Catherine returned she had the distinct feeling that something was wrong and voiced her concern in the village. When grocer Whiting heard the boys had been taken very sick, and that his flour was being blamed, he emptied the remainder of the mixture into the privy and washed out the bin in which the flour had been kept so thoroughly that not a vestige

remained. This merely emphasised the suspicions being entertained. The matter came to the attention of a magistrate who arranged for the remains of the dumpling to be dug up and sent to the Jacksonian Professor at Cambridge University. There Professor Francis Hyde Wollaston's detailed investigations revealed that mercury had been added to the flour and he found the same poisoned ingredients in the unboiled dumplings. His careful analysis saw Whiting appear in court.

At first he attempted to vindicate himself by telling a series of lies, denying ever having any such a poison or corrosive substance in his house. However the testimony of the person from whom he had bought the business four years earlier revealed that there had been four ounces of mercury among various other drugs he'd inherited.

When the matter was put to the jury they had no hesitation in bring in a verdict of guilty, giving Christian no alternative to pronouncing a sentence of death. Any doubt was dispelled when Whiting made a full and free confession of his crime to the clergyman who attended him in gaol, only a few days previous to his execution. Had the two lads died the estate would have been divided between their youngest and oldest sisters – Whiting's wife

Professor Wollaston became famous for inventing a thermometrical barometer for measuring altitudes, but his involvement with the murderous Methodist grocer of Little Downham ensured his place in the history of Cambridgeshire crime.

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Professor Edward Christian had been appointed the Chief Justice of the Isle of Ely in 1800 and was proud of the lack of crime in his area. In 1804 he had rejoiced that there was not a single prisoner for trial, indeed it had been two years since anybody had been convicted of anything. Even then the worst offenders had not been fen folk but villains from outside the area. It was, he bragged, in part due to the dedication with which he would come down hard, but fairly, on any miscreant.

Since then, however, things had deteriorated and by 1816 he was pronouncing sentence of death once a year on average. Not that all suffered that fate; just four had been hanged -10 had been spared thanks to his own recommendation of mercy, two from the intervention of others.

All that changed follow the outbreak of riot at Littleport in the spring of 1816 that had seen German mercenary troops called in to round up the ringleaders for trial. For Christian this was an opportunity to achieve national recognition for his judgelike prowess. But others did not agree and it was even suggested that a short Bill should be brought into Parliament to have the rioters tried by juries from another county.

Christian was incensed: "Juries from another county!" he'd exclaimed: "There are not better juries in any part of the world". There was no region of England more opulent and independent than the Isle of Ely: its Gentlemen farmers were possessed of capitals to an extraordinary extent. Their land fattened the largest bullocks, produced the richest dairies and the most luxuriant crops of every kind, with the least labour and the least addition of manure. There was a most extensive inland navigation, communicating with the flourishing out-ports of Lynn and Wisbech and this extensive union of agriculture and commerce rendered the inhabitants of the Isle of Ely pre-eminently prosperous, civilized, and well educated, he argued

So the trial went ahead in Ely: but should Christian himself be amongst the judges? It was suggested, from the highest circles, that he should stand aside on this occasion. Edward would have none of it: no power on earth would compel him to give up his seat: it would be

injurious to the administration of justice and – what was worse - an admission that he was incompetent to try other prisoners in future.

So Christian had been named as one of the three judges, along with James Burrough and Charles Abbott, though he was kept very much in a minor role. They journeyed by carriage from Cambridge to be greeted by the Bishop of Ely. Elliott Smith had heard something of what happened next from an old fenman called Legge:

“The Bishop, Bowyer Sparke, came out of his Palace door, shook hands with them then took them inside and gave them a good breakfast; at least, it must have been a good blow-out because, when they came out, one of them was wiping egg-yolk off his lips.

“The Bishop came out first; he was so fat he waddled just like a duck and he was wearing what looked like a night-shift, only it was too white for that. Then the judges came out, all dressed up in long capes with fur on the collars, and their heads were covered with wigs of long hair that fell down each side of their chops. After them came a lot of chaps trying to look very big and important; they were carrying long, white-painted sticks, just like a lot of boys with osiers, going fishing. After that lot had gone into the Cathedral, the doors were locked and us outside could hear them singing ‘God Save the King’ at the tops of their voices, then a lot of muttering and then some more singing, before the judges came out and got in to their carriage for the drive to the Market Place.

“A little later the Bishop's coach came to pick him up. But Sparke was so fat that he was wider than the door and needed help to squeeze in. In the confusion somebody knocked the lynch-pin out of the off-side, hind wheel so when the coachman whipped the horses into a trot, the wheel came off, giving the Bishop such a jolt that he sat there as white as a sheet, looking as silly as an old goose that's sat three weeks on addled eggs”. It was not an audacious start to the proceedings.

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Edward Christian had taken his place as one of three judges at the trial of those indicted for riot at Littleport. There were so many prisoners whose cases were to be considered and so many relatives and friends anxious to see a fair trial that it seemed as if the Court House on the Market Place would be completely swamped. So one of the early decisions was to station soldiers at the door to keep the onlookers out.

Pickwick had heard of the proceedings at first hand from Henry Martin, how the first of those indicted had been discharged on a technicality, only for some to be hanged anyway. When the whole trial had ground to a result and the sentences of death proclaimed the two senior judges had departed leaving Christian with one final case to consider, that of a poor thirteen-year-old boy who was found guilty of theft. The lad had already witnessed grown men in tears as their fates had been pronounced, now he was left on his own to face the Downing Professor of Laws, sitting alone on the bench.

It was not an occasion Christian was going to allow to pass. In normal circumstances this would have been the only crime within the district; he felt personally affronted that such a reputation for peacefulness should have been sullied by the action of such deluded, drunken men.

At least his fellow judges had been treated with dignity: they’d been escorted to and from the court by respectable citizens – nobody mentioned the numerous soldiers who’d also been

employed to make sure that peace had been maintained. Now things were back to normal, now it was Christian who was the law in this land and his own powerful position had been upheld. He would see that justice was done without favour – or without fear. (Nobody mentioned how during the trial they'd seen his body quivering as if with cold, despite the oppressive heat of that barricaded courtroom).

Finally, having delivered an address that would be published widely, Edward Christian turned to the young man quaking in the dock: "Prisoner at the bar, your commitment and imprisonment will have taught you that honesty is the best policy and dishonesty with worst. You will pay a fine of one shilling to the King, and be discharged". There had been enough hanging for that day already.

But perhaps the judge had been influenced by the thought that the next hanging he attended might be that of a member of his own family. For just a month before the Littleport activities a play had been performed in the Theatre Royal, Drury Lane. It was entitled 'Pitcairn Island: a romantick operatick Ballet Spectacle, founded on the recent Discovery of a Numerous Colony, formed by, and descended from the Mutineers of The Bounty Frigate'.

It was a reminder of something Edward Christian could never forget: the fact that he had a younger brother named Fletcher who had sought his fortune, not in academia but on the high seas.

They had grown up together on the estate on the edge of the Lake District that had been purchased – so legend had it – with money won on a single night's gambling with the Bishop of Sodor and Man. Their father was Coroner of Cumberland, the family had many high connections and Fletcher had attended Cockermouth grammar school along with William Wordsworth. But whilst Edward had gone to Cambridge University, Fletcher had run away to sea. where he became a midshipman before seeking a berth on the Eurydice bound for the West Indies under one the most distinguished Captains, William Bligh. The two had got on well so that when the chance came for what should be a most profitable voyage on the newly-refitted, well-armed 'Bethia', Fletcher was offered the position of Master's Mate. Then, just before they departed from Spithead in September 1787, she had been renamed 'Bounty'. It was the last time Christian was ever to see his brother – or was it?

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Edward Christian, one of the judges who'd sentenced the Littleport rioters to hang, had followed his brother Fletcher's, naval career with interest.

After he'd departed on the 'Bounty' in September 1787 on an expedition to transport bread-fruit to the slave colonies of the West Indies, there was no knowing what was happening to him. It was two years later, in September 1789 before news was received that the voyage had not been uneventful but Lieutenant Bligh and all his crew were in good health. They had been well received by most of the natives, although at one island they'd attempted to steal a boat and an anchor, resulting in some hostility. The bread-fruit trees were in so prosperous a state that Lieutenant Blight was confident that they would arrive safe in the West Indian Settlement. Everything was obviously going well

However that news had taken a very long time to arrive in England and unknown to anybody by then things were anything but peaceful on the Bounty. For eleven months later, the Admiralty received a despatch from Captain Bligh, saying he had lost his ship on 28th April 1789: "A little before Sun Rise Fletcher Christian who was Mate of the Ship, and Officer of the Watch, with the Ship's Corporal came into my Cabin while I was asleep and seizing me

tied my hands with a Cord assisted by others, who were also in the Cabin, all armed with Musquets and Bayonets. I was now threated with instant Deth, if I spoke a Word.

"I now demanded of Christian the Cause of such a violent Act, but no other answer was given but hold your Tongue Sir, or you are dead this Instant, and holding me by the Cord, which tied my hands, he as often threatened to stab me in the Breast with a Bayonet he held in his right hand. The Boatswain was ordered to hoist the launch out and while I was kept under a guard with Christian at their head abaft the Mizen Mast, the Officers and Men, not concerned in the Mutiny were ordered into the Boat. They carried me across the deck with their Bayonets presented on every Side. I was forced into the boat and we were then veered astern, in all nineteen souls."

The Times was suspicious: "There are three circumstances in the case of the disaster which happened to Captain Bligh that are unparallelled in the annals of mutiny. The first is that out of forty-seven men, eighteen should suffer themselves to be pinioned and put aboard a boat, at the almost certainty of death, without the least resistance. Second that the secret of the conspiracy should be so well kept by twenty-seven men (most of them very young) as not to give the least suspicion to the rest of the crew". Thirdly, the paper asked, why should they do it: in those seas there was no possibility of plunder, or committing the smallest act of piracy.

But on his arrival in England Captain Bligh had his story well prepared – in fact he was going to publish it as soon as the type could be set. Soon The Times was printing extracts telling of his wonderful survival after 49 days in an open boat. And as for the reason for the revolt: the women of those distant lands were handsome, mild and cheerful; they were possessed of great sensibility and have sufficient delicacy to make them admired and beloved. Is it to be wondered at that a set of sailors should be led astray on the finest island in the world, where they need not labour and where the allurements or dissipation are beyond anything that can be conceived?

It was a good story; soon it was being acted out on the stage of the Royalty Theatre. The formal court-martial for the loss of his ship absolved Bligh of all guilt; he was soon back at sea resuming a career that promised greatness. And the Royal Navy despatched a gunboat, HMS Pandora, to bring the mutineers home for trial – if they could be found.

For Professor Edward Christian the thought that his brother might be a womaniser was unsurprising – it was a trait that ran in the family and it was well-known that boat-loads of prostitutes were regularly taken aboard ships when in port. But that Fletcher should be a mutineer was something else. He started to turn his academic mind to an analysis of the evidence.

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Professor Edward Christian had to face the fact that his brother Fletcher was a *Bounty* mutineer. It was something that ran in the family for his other brother, Charles, had also been involved in mutiny while serving as surgeon on the *Middlesex* in September 1787. Then a seaman had pointed a loaded pistol at the Captain's breast, the First Officer had been accused of assisting him and the Second dismissed for drunkenness and insolent language. Charles was charged with conspiracy and all had been locked in their cabins. Each was suspended from the service of the East India Company but the Captain had been heavily fined as he was felt to be to blame.

Now another Captain, William Bligh, was telling his version of how another Christian, Fletcher, had led a more serious rebellion. This time the Captain was absolved of any blame and the Navy ordered to bring the mutineers to hang for their crime. A ship was sent out to

search for them in Tahiti or one of the other Friendly or Society Islands deep in the south Pacific.

Bligh gave a detail description of the men they were looking for. They included "Fletcher Christian, aged 24 years, five feet nine inches high, blackish or very dark brown complexion, dark brown hair, strong made; a star tatowed on his left breast, tatowed on his backside; his knees stand out a little, and he may be called rather bow legged. He is subject to violent perspirations, and particularly in his hands, so that he soils any thing he handles". Edward was in no doubt that this was his brother, even though he had not been tattooed before he'd started on that journey.

Weeks turned to months and then years before members of the *Bounty*'s crew were actually in the dock. There were not many of them. Several had been drowned when the boat bringing them home had been shipwrecked and others had just not been found. One of those missing was Fletcher Christian.

Edward had followed the progress of the trial carefully; as expected it resulted in sentences of death. But not all hung. One who was pardoned was Peter Heywood, a young Midshipman, and the first thing he did on his release was write to the Professor to pass on a personal message from one brother to another.

Hearing Heywood's version of what had occurred galvanised Edward into action. He gathered together a team of men who would be believed and then tracked down and interviewed everybody who had been involved in the affair. He uncovered a tale of bullying and erratic behaviour that was echoed by others who had sailed with Bligh on other expeditions. When he published what he'd found it caused a sensation.

That gallant Captain had been sent far away on another voyage but when he returned he was questioned intently about the allegations that had been made. In 1794 he responded with his own pamphlet containing yet more testimony including some from the same people who had been interviewed by Christian, claiming that they had been misrepresented. But no seaman can compete with a Cambridge academic when it comes to presenting conflicting evidence and Bligh's reputation was ruined.

The truth would only come out when the missing mutineers had been tracked down, and nobody knew where they were. Fletcher Christian had left Tahiti in Bounty with a handful of sailors, six native men and nineteen native women, most of whom had been invited aboard for a final farewell party only to awaken from a night's debauchery to find that the ship had sailed. One woman had jumped overboard and swum ashore, the rest apparently submitted to their fate. But there was one who went willingly, for Fletcher had gone through a form of marriage – and Professor Christian of Cambridge University had a native sister-in-law.

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Professor Edward Christian had successfully defended his brother Fletcher's actions on the Bounty against the allegations of its Captain William Blight. But nobody knew what had become of him after he'd sailed away with a small crew leaving the remainder of the mutineers on Tahiti

It was a mystery that ended in September 1796 when *The True Briton* reprinted a series of letters published in Cadiz. In them Fletcher Christian exonerated Bligh from any blame and went on to describe his later adventures in which he'd visit Juan Fernandez before being shipwrecked whilst rescuing the Major-General of the Kingdom of Chili [NIGEL THIS IS HOW HE SPELT IT]. The letters had – according to Bligh – been written to Edward, 'that sixpenny Professor who has more law about him than honour'.

Edward maintained a dignified silence but other did not. William Wordsworth, a childhood friend of Fletcher's, claimed the letters were forgeries and others agreed. Rumours persisted for a while but then nearly everybody forgot the tale.

It was thirteen years later in 1809 before the Admiralty received a despatch from the Captain of an American whaling ship '*Topaz'*. He had stumbled upon an island called Pitcairn not marked on any map and there found an Englishman by the name of Alexander Smith who said he had sailed on the Bounty. The tales he told matched those given by the returned mutineers at their trials and was for the first time went on to complete the tale. Fletcher and his small crew of sailors and a number of male and female native Tahitans had, after weeks of searching, finally discovered that remote island where they had run their ship ashore.

There they had eked out a living until about 1803 when the native men had rioted, slaughtering every Englishman except Smith. At this the native women had turned on their own countrymen, killing all of them and leaving just Smith, several children and nine women. He had recovered from his wounds and now was growing yams, cocoanuts and bananas on that rocky outcrop with hardly any water and no safe anchorage.

As for Fletcher Christian, he had become insane shortly after the arrival on the island and thrown himself off the rocks. If this was a report that could be believed then Edward could close a chapter on the family history. But he could open another one, for his brother had left behind a son named Thursday October Christian. However other rumours were persisting that Fletcher had in fact returned home to the Lake District. If so his brother remained very quite about it being more interested in fighting for good rooms in the new Downing College of which he was a founder-member.

It was to be five years before in September 1814 two naval frigates, *Briton*, captained by Thomas Staines & *Tagus* under Captain Pipon spotted Pitcairn again. They found the island populated with children & teenagers and just one adult corpulent European. All had different stories as to what had happened to Fletcher, some claiming that he'd turned into a tyrant and been killed by a black man.

It brought a fresh wave of plays, including 'Pitcairn Island: a romantick operatick Ballet Spectackle' that packed the audiences at Drury Lane, and a number of books which found their way into Cambridge University Library under the Copyright agreement that Edward Christian had fought to establish. One was Lieutenant Shillibeer's 'Narrative of *The Briton's* voyage to Pitcairn's Island' which included sketches of the island and of the young man who was claimed to be the Professor's son-in-law.

All this Edward Christian suffered as he declined into senility, wandering the streets looking for anybody to talk to – which is how Elliott Smith had come to meet him. But he retained enough of a reputation to ensure that Lord Byron waited until after his death in 1823 before publishing a poem 'The Island, or Christian and his Comrades', based on Bligh's version of the story. It was followed by John Barrow's more reasoned study, 'The Eventful History of the Mutiny and Piratical Seizure of HMS Bounty', in which he endorsed Edward's interpretation of the events which had made the family name infamous.

[Fletcher Christian sources
C.S. Wilkinson. The wake of the Bounty. Cassell. 1953
Glynn Christian. Fragile paradise. Hamilton. 1982
Stanley French History of Downing college
Shillibeer's 'Narrative of *The Briton's* voyage to Pitcairn's Island' (googlebooks)

Times 23 Sep 1789

Times 18 Mar 1790
Times 26 Mar 1790
Times 31 Mar 1790
Times 7 Sep 1790
Times 13 Sep 1796]

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The conversation in the Little Rose coffee house, Trumpington Street paused as the door opened and a country clergyman entered. He was drenched to the skin following one of those cloudbursts that can occur even in during a Cambridge summer, drowning one street whilst leaving its neighbour untouched.

Elliott Smith recognised the arrival as Samuel Elsdale who ministered in a Lincolnshire parish whose church tower was leaning to a considerable extent, Surfleet just north of Spalding. It ran alongside the River Glenn just before it discharged into the Wash.

Soon the arrival was reminiscing about a previous storm, that of Saturday 10th November 1810, which had gone down in the parish folklore as the most awful visitation in the annals of time.

He recalled: Just as us inhabitant of Surfleet had retired to bed we were alarmed by the news that the sea banks were broken and the sheep swimming in the pastures. A breach of the bank took place at the outfall of the Vernatt's drain destroying one of the arches and the drain filled with salt water. The Toad gulled in various places and the Reservoir presented a melancholy scene of ruin

Immediately the graziers turned out into the pelting of that pitiless storm to rescue their distressed flocks. A great many sheep were drowned and the cottage of one shepherd totally gutted by the tide - the poor man and his family waded to the house of their neighbour, Mr William Beasley only to find they too had been forced to quit their home for safety. A cottage and barn belonging to Mr Wheat near the New Sea Bank were completely swept away and floating furniture and corn stacks were a common sight for days afterwards.

Elsewhere at Fosdyke both new and old banks were broken down and the tide came on the lands so suddenly that a servant maid of Mr Birkett was surrounded by the sea whilst milking the cows in a pasture and perished before assistance could be given. Another elderly woman was washed out of an upper window of her cottage and drowned. Even the Inn was in imminent danger of being swept away: owing to the violence of the rain from above and the fury of the waves from below there was not a dry room in the house.

The losses at sea were extremely dreadful. Not fewer than forty wrecks were thrown up along the coast and dead bodies of sailors washed up on shore after almost every tide off Mablethorpe, Theddlethorpe, Sutton and the neighbouring parishes. Two casks of spirits cast ashore at Gedney were found by two labouring men who helped themselves so plentifully that one of them died in consequence

Boston church was under water to a considerable depth in every part except the chancel to which there was an ascent of two steps. At the western end of the steeple the water was two feet eight inches and a half deep and divine service could not be performed.

But it was the impact on the animals that had really hit home: “It was shocking to see the sheep lying dead: I myself counted nearly forty drowned in a field of about five acres and it is feared about fifteen thousand sheep and cattle were lost. Even days afterwards when the dry

land began to be seen it was terrible to hear the mournful lowings of the bullocks trying to find fresh water to quench their thirst – but every drop had been tainted by the salt sea."

But amidst the horrors of that night, the Reverend could find some small cause for rejoicing: God had been merciful to the old inclosures of Surfleet which had been in the most perilous situation from the threatened collapse of the Glen Sluice. It had been expected to give way every moment but had providentially weathered that most tremendous storm which the memory of the oldest man living could not parallel. He reflected: "The waves of the sea are mighty and rage horribly but yet the Lord who dwelleth on high is mightier"

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Apart from the occasional flood, the highlight of the Rev Samuel Elsdale's ministry at Surfleet had been at Whitsuntide when the annual village sports saw the church filled with flutes and hautboys and gay streamers for the traditional sermon before a communal dinner.

Otherwise too many of his parishioners seemed to patronise the two inns, the Mermaid and the Crown, adding to their poverty. When things turned tough they resorted to the parish workhouse which was tended by a vile wretch who locked the cupboard door and, poor himself, half starved his poorer brethren. It had been supplemented by thirteen almshouses providing homes for widows and antiquated women who turned their spinning wheels while their elderly husbands tended the gardens which, rent free, eked out the long last hours of their lives.

Elsdale was obviously a lonely man who wanted to talk, and a poet who tended to versify on many topics – including his parish where he had existed for many years on a curate's stipend of £25 a year. But Pickwick was not sure he wished to be regaled with yet more rustic rhymes.

When he tried to change the subject he learned that the Reverend had not been without his personal tragedy; his daughter Helen had died of scarlet fever whilst his nephew John Molson, who he had brought up after the lad had been orphaned, had emigrated to Canada at the age of 18. There he had gone into the meat business before earning enough as a brewer to be able to buy himself a farm south of Montreal. He'd now diversified into building steam ships and was a most important man in those far distant shores.

As for Samuel, he had given up his pastorship for the post of master of the Free Grammar School at Moulton where he took eight boarders. He had one overriding ambition, to become a Spalding gentleman and be admitted to their Society. It was most unlikely this would ever be achieved.

Back in 1710 a number of wealthy and leisured men had taken to meeting at a coffee house in the Abbey Yard in Spalding to pass away an hour in literary conversation and read 'The Tatler'. Some were members of the Society of Antiquaries of London and decided to form a 'Society of Gentlemen, for the supporting of mutual benevolence, and their improvement in the liberal sciences and in polite learning'. Early members included Sir Isaac Newton, Alexander Pope, Dr. William Stukeley, John Gay the poet, the Rev. Richard Bentley of Trinity College and Sir Hans Sloane, whose collections formed the nucleus of the British Museum. Each on admission presented one valuable book to the Society so over the years they had amassed a valuable library.

The Gentlemen's Society had flourished thanks to its founder, Maurice Johnson, known as 'the Antiquary'. He'd served as secretary for thirty five years during which time he filled four large folio volumes with historical notes interspersed with manuscripts, anecdotes, drawings and poems. Elsdale had had the privilege of visiting the room at Ayscoughfee Hall where the Society met and in which the rarities were deposited. He had been horrified to find it in a state of sad neglect: it ought to either be disposed of by public auction or presented to another museum to save it from the hands of its members who had an opportunity of taking what many eminent men had for many years eagerly laboured to collect and preserve.

Should Pickwick visit Spalding he must be sure to use his best endeavours to gain admission and marvel at such a hidden treasure in that gem of a town. It was an concept that should be repeated in communities elsewhere, in fact there was talk of something similar at Huntingdon.

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Huntingdon was a town that enjoyed a number of literary societies. One had been set up at The George years earlier, its members dining together every month. Seeing its success Mr Wood the bookseller established a Ladies' Book Society which met in his shop. This was followed by a Huntingdon Book Club, a Huntingdon Literary Society and a general circulating library established by Alexander Peterkin.

Huntingdon folk were also interested in the past, nor was this passion confined to people who were antiquated. A young teacher, Robert Carruthers, sought out interesting snippets and made notes on the human bones that kept turning up to produce a history of the town. But the booklet that attracted the most attention was the fascinating story of the rector of Stukeley.

Little Stukeley is a small village of about 380 inhabitants situated in a hollow betwixt two hills about three miles from Huntingdon. The Church, a handsome Gothic pile though in rather a dilapidated state, stands on a considerable eminence and commands a fine view of the village. From an inscription over the south porch it appears it was enlarged or repaired in the year 1652; the tower is dated 1659 and the whole covered in ivy.

It was a peaceful and quiet agricultural village – or at least it was until a July morning in 1827 when gossip spread that the 81-year-old rector who had been incumbent of the parish for about fourteen years, had put a period to his own existence by cutting his throat. Like much gossip, it was not all true.

The eccentricities of the deceased were well known among his parishioners.

The Reverend Joshua Waterhouse had lived an unusual sort of life for a parson. He'd started off as apprentice to a shoemaker, but had run away. Then he'd enlisted in the army and been wounded at the battle of Foutenoy against the French. As he lay moaning on the ground he'd noticed the gold watch and chain adorning the body of a dead officer beside him and stretched out his arm to retrieve it. But another solder had the same idea, lifted up his rifle and shot him in the head: he was worse wounded by his own comrade-in-arms than by the enemy.

Joshua recovered and went up to St Catharine's college, Cambridge where he earned only a poor degree but was awarded a Fellowship - no other of the college undergraduates having done even so well as him.

Despite his poor academic ability when the Master of St Cats, Dr Lowther Yates, died Waterhouse decided to stand for election. There were only five electors, including himself, and he was so sure he'd be appointed that he moved in to the Master's house – only to have to

get out when it was discovered that another contender had received one more vote. Others murmured that it was less to do with his academic ability that his personal cleanliness.

In those days he was one of the handsomest, best-dressed men in Cambridge; he visited Bath and other fashionable watering places, mingling with the best society in the bustle of the busy and the flutter of the gay.

He also had a pulpit: he'd taken the living of Coton where he soon manifested the eccentricities that were to follow his later career. During one Sunday service in church he'd spotted a young man enter his house. He knew the lad was in the habit of visiting his housekeeper and it was not a courtship he wished to encourage. So he'd told his Clerk, Mr Agar, to give out a good long psalm and left the pulpit. Agar, faithful to his trust, sang on till the rector returned by which time he'd accomplished some twenty verses.

Then in 1806 the Reverend Waterhouse gave £2,000 for the presentation to the rectory of Little Stukeley where he bought a piece of land and waited for the incumbent to die. It was seven years before James Torkington obliged and the villagers waited to see just who it was that would succeed him.

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Joshua Waterhouse, the new rector of Little Stukeley, was nearly 70 when he moved into the parsonage. Although he had been a dandy in his youth by then he was somewhat careless of his dress – a coarse blue great coat, corduroy breeches and light grey stockings were his usual costume. But he would not allow any of his parishioners to appear in church in a smock frock, the usual garb of the agricultural labourers - any who arrived so dressed was instantly ordered to leave.

He had no time for the 'old soldiers' who constantly came begging: one Sunday while preaching he noticed a beggar prowling round the rectory grounds. So he did what he'd done before while at Coton: he gave out a Psalm, descended from the desk, threw off his surplice at the door and thrashed the offender off the premises before re-entering the church and proceeding to read the lesson.

He determined to farm his 300 acres of glebe land himself but refused to pay labourers the same rate as other farmers. As a consequence the rector's land remained uncultivated while the men could find work elsewhere. Frequently you would see the snow covering his standing grain, or the cattle feeding in his cornfields. The rectory garden became a wilderness and scores of pigs besported themselves on what had once been the lawn.

The rectory house was large and elegant but it did not remain that way for long. The bachelor rector lived only in the kitchen and a bedroom upstairs, blocking up the windows of the other rooms to evade the payment of the window tax.

When wheat was fetching a good price he stored his grain, hoping for even better returns. Then rather than hire barns he made use of those empty rectory rooms: each became filled with corn, wool and other articles. Sadly he miscalculated when to sell so the produce became rotten and useless, eventually selling for a loss. As a result the rectory abounded in rats from turret to foundation stone. Indeed while his corpse was laying in the kitchen before burial one of the men employed to sit up with it nodded off until a tremendous rat mounted the table and ran off with the candle. It frightened the chap out of his wits.

The Rev Joshua Waterhouse had been a great romantic: when clearing his house the workmen found a mass of correspondence, most of it love letters - there were enough to fill an entire sack. At least some of them seemed to have worked for at one time he believed himself to be on the brink of matrimony. It was then time to prepare a proper home for his soon-to-be wife and he had two or three apartments elegantly furnished. Men came from Cambridge to do the work, with about £300 spent to make things ready for the bride. But sadly the match was broken off; the curtains and splendid mirrors remained in their cotton coverings and the Turkey carpets became covered with sprung grain.

Though he lived in a 'muddling way' few farms had a better stocked farm-yard: he devoted more care on his pigs than himself. Every Saturday he attended Huntingdon market on foot, sometimes driving his pigs before him, and after transacting his business would come home carrying his tea, sugar and other necessities in a basket. No matter what the weather – hail, rain or snow – the old rector would be perambulating his grounds or hallooing his workmen or cattle. He was fond of the chase, frequently sleeping under hedges so as to be early in the field on the first of September. Inevitably his clothes became very soiled. So he would visit the fish pond and scrub them with a brush.

Waterhouse was a great horse breeder and died possessed of considerable property. At the sale of his effects every horse, gig or chaise in Huntingdonshire was requisitioned as droves of people made their way to Little Stukeley to share the gossip of his life and reflect on the manner of his death.

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Rev Joshua Waterhouse lived almost constantly alone in his Little Stukeley parsonage with no regular female domestic and on the morning of the fatal day the old woman who occasionally assisted in the management of his house had been sent into a field to hoe thistles.

About half past ten o'clock two boys entered the kitchen to eat their lunch, as they usually did. When they sat down on a form opposite the fireplace they noticed the rector's legs hanging over the side of a large brewing tub which stood in an adjoining passage and heard unusual, deep groans. Alarmed, the lads ran to the house of a neighbour, Ann Whitney, and told her what they had seen. She thought the Reverend was probably drunk and told the lads to finish their dockey at her house.

In the meantime a young man named Frederick Rogers had knocked at the Rectory door, gone in and seen what the lads had seen. He went for William Ashby who lifted the rector out, lying him on the floor. That's when they noticed his throat had been cut.

Well there was no doubt it was murder. The question was who'd done it. Various folk described strangers that had been in the area, and there were several village candidates – men who already had convictions of one sort and another, including a couple of Slades – John and Joshua.

Joshua said he'd been drinking at Swan, then walked to Godmanchester to invite his sister, a married woman, to Stukely feast. He'd then spent time drinking in the Horse and Jockey at Huntingdon and the Rose and Crown, Godmanchester. She backed his story but villagers didn't believe her and constable John Richardson investigated. He soon found the tale was a pack of lies.

Then new evidence came forward, Peter Sabey told how he saw somebody climb over the rector's wall; he didn't see his face but from the fellow was lobbing from side to side, he was sure it was Slade. Joshua's clothes had blood on them and his shoes matched a footmark near the rectory kitchen window.

People recalled how a few weeks earlier the rector had been robbed by a person who'd concealed himself in the house and taken his watch and money from the pockets of his clothes as they lay on the bedroom floor. At that time Slade's sister was in his service and was suspected of being privy to the theft. A Bow Street Runner was called in who got a warrant to search Slade's parents' house where he found several flitches of bacon, sacks of peas and a quantity of pork and ham – all this in the cottage of a couple who were receiving alms from the parish every week as they were supposed to be starving.

Then Joshua's Slade's brother turned himself in, saying he'd been concerned in various other burglaries with a man named Heddings. Next Heddings gave himself up to a shepherd, having hid in a hovel near New Pasture Common for four days. He gave evidence that Joshua had confessed to the murder after the rector had disturbed him as he'd burgled the house. It had not been the only time: Waterhouse had frequently recovered property from the Slade's house but abstained from legal prosecution fearing that his own immoral conduct would itself be exposed to public reproof!

The Rector had made plans for his own funeral: he was to be buried twelve foot deep, the coffin standing perpendicularly on its foot, his face fronting east so he would be ready for when the final trumpet sounded. But although he was buried twelve feet down, the coffin was placed in the usual position.

A monument was erected: Sacred to the Memory of the Rev Joshua Waterhouse BD who was inhumanly murdered in his parsonage house about ten o'clock on the morning of July 3rd 1827 aged 81

Beneath this Tomb his Mangled body's laid
Cut Stabb'd and Murdered by Joshua Slade.
His ghastly Wounds a horrid sight to see
And hurl'd at once into Eternity.
What faults you've seen in him take care to shun
And look at home enough there's to he done
Death does not allways warning give
Therefore he carefull how you live

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The trial of Joshua Slade for the murder of the Little Stukeley rector attracted considerable attention; local and London papers flocked to Huntingdon including reporters from The Times, Courier, Morning Chronicle, Morning Herald, Sun and Standard.

Joshua's descent into crime was blamed on the kindness of the Sunday School teacher at Great Stukeley: she'd encouraged his learning awarding him merit tickets, but one Sunday he lost them and dare never return. The little learning he'd gained was soon forgotten and he was left destitute of all religious and moral instruction. He saw nothing that was good around him and consequently had no check upon his evil inclinations. His natural activity sought employment in fraud and cunning and from his earliest years he was looked upon as a lad of suspicious character.

The first open act of dishonesty in which he was detected occurred in his fourteenth year. He'd noticed where their neighbour, Mrs Bedford, left her key, entered her house and stolen a sovereign from a bureau. On discovering her loss Mrs Bedford taxed the lad with the theft. For some time the boy denied it in the strongest terms but on his father promising him a shilling if he gave up the money he then drew the sovereign from his pocket and handed it

back. His mother remarked that he'd done well – for he'd got a shilling by it! He was a bright lad, she boasted: there was nothing Joshua could not turn his hand to. Had he been a scholar he would have been a forger!

In 1824 the Slade family was turned out of their house and their effects sold for debt so they rented a small cottage in Little Stukeley. It was then that Joshua first gained employment with the Reverend Waterhouse from whom he was soon stealing regularly. He made a bunch of skeleton keys - twenty seven in number - with which he could open every room in the house and on Sunday mornings during the time of divine service frequently entered the parsonage with his friend Heddings and regaled themselves on the ale and wine of the rector's cellar. They even drank the strong ale the parson had reserved for the pallbearers who were to carry him to his grave – substituting weaker beer from other casks. After the murder Joshua actually visited the victim as he lay in his coffin and asked for the lid to be unscrewed so he could pay his last respects.

The trial mainly rested upon the evidence of his accomplice, William Heddings. Without it the case would have consisted entirely of circumstances. But with it the jury was convinced and the judge pronounced the dread sentence: "That you Joshua Slade be taken from hence to the prison from whence you came and from thence on Thursday next to the place of execution, that you there be hanged by the neck till you are dead and your body afterwards be dissected and anatomized and may the Lord in his infinite goodness have mercy on your soul"

Slade was then removed to a cell behind the dock and after the buzz in the Court had subsided his accomplice William Heddings was charged with breaking into the house of Emmanuel Thompson at Stow and stealing a quantity of bacon, three sovereigns and two one pound notes. He too was found guilty and sentenced to death.

After the trial the two condemned men were chained together and taken back to gaol. Their return to the prison was marked with the most unbecoming levity. Slade pushed Heddings in sport from side to side and laughed to see what he described as "such a parcel of fools following them". Joshua entered the prison with an air of vulgar triumph and waited for the date of his execution. But his wait was extended for on the appointed day a messenger arrived bearing a twenty-four hour respite. All that time he steadfastly maintained his innocence.

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Had Joshua Slade continued to attend the Sunday School sessions at Great Stukeley he might never have been convicted of the murder of the Reverend Waterhouse. Even if he had at least he may have been taught to read and thus had the opportunity of knowing how well he had met his own awful death

In Huntingdon gaol Slade continued up till the afternoon of the day of his execution to deny all participation in the murder. He deserved death, he said, for the numerous offences he had committed. He had frequently robbed Mr Waterhouse and on one occasion he had threatened his life, but of the horrid deed for which he was about to suffer he was as innocent as the child unborn.

The same declaration he made repeatedly to his relatives and particularly to one of his sisters who was much affected at parting with him. His poor old father did not come from Stukeley but his mother visited him in prison and parted from her son without the least emotion. "You know", said she "that I never told yon to steal. I brought you up as well as I could". "Yes", said the gaoler who was standing by, "but you know that you partook of the stolen goods and must have been all along aware of the course of life your children were pursuing". "Ay",

agreed the virago, “but God bless you Josh; good bye- what way do I go to get out”. And so saying she took her departure.

Those knowledgeable in such matters remarked that it had been exactly 41 years earlier that the last execution for murder Huntingdonshire had been carried out. That was that of Jarvis Matchan had been executed and then hung in chains in the parish of Alconbury for the murder of a boy named Jones, a drummer in the 49th regiment of foot. The gibbet on which he’d been suspended was only taken down the week before the murder of Mr Waterhouse

Inside the gaol the sacrament was administered to the unhappy youth and though he believed himself to be within an hour of his death he persisted in declaring his total ignorance of the murder. But later he sent for the Chaplain and entered into a full and unreserved disclosure of his guilt. Yet before Slade had finished confessing the Under-sheriff arrived from Cambridge carrying another stay of execution.

This postponement disappointed thousands of persons who had assembled from all parts of the county to witness the painful exhibition. Huntingdon was literally filled with visitors, the gallows was erected in the usual place and every preparation had been made for the expected execution. But the reprieve put stop to the proceeding and instantly dispersed the multitude.

However not everything could be delayed. A publisher who made his living by recording the dying speeches of the condemned had already printed a large souvenir describing Slade’s last moments on the scaffold. It was couched in the usual language of these posthumous broadsides and experienced an immense sale. It read:

“This morning, precisely at the appointed time the prisoner underwent the awful sentence of the law on a gallows erected for that purpose. At the place of execution he behaved with more propriety than was at first expected and appeared impressed with his dreadful situation. He acknowledged that he deserved death and exhorted all who witnessed his sad untimely end to beware of giving way to the many temptations that daily present themselves to the giddy and thoughtless; and which if the mind is not daily employed in industry becomes an easy prey to the dissolute and is led astray to commit some petty theft; and that once done, others follow in succession; - so avoid all bad company, keep holy the Sabbath, and remember thy creator in the days of thy youth. He then forgave all who bad witnessed against him - the drop fell - and he was launched into eternity”
The truth was somewhat different

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The actual execution of Joshua Slade for the murder of the Rector of Little Stukeley went ahead some days later. The delay gave time for his father, a wretched looking old man bent almost double by age and infirmity, to come and take leave of him. So did one of his sisters who came bearing remarkable news: she had seen his picture in a shop window, it was a very good likeness which had been sketched in court during his trial.

On that last night Joshua slept soundly and spent the morning with the Chaplain in his religious duties. At ten o clock the Sacrament was administered to him in the chapel in presence of the other prisoners of whom he took his leave, shaking hands with them all and telling them to take warning by his fate. About eleven the Under-sheriff arrived accompanied by several constables. Joshua’s irons were knocked off and his arms and wrists pinioned before he was conducted to the cart which awaited at the door to convey him to the place of execution. At the same time the bell of St Mary's Church, Huntingdon began to toll.

Slade's firmness seemed to forsake him in these trying moments and he shook violently. His countenance was pale as death and he seemed unable to sit upright. He was dressed in the clothes in which he committed the murder - a dirty fustian jacket and trousers. His hat was pulled over his brows, his eyes shut and he seemed internally engaged in prayer during the progress of the melancholy cavalcade.

Little Stukeley Rectory

The gallows was erected in the outskirts of the town near the race course where the common land suddenly descends and forms a sort of natural theatre in front of the river. The sides of the hills and the plain below were crowded with spectators – there could not have been less than four thousand persons present. Indeed during the whole of the day Huntingdon resembled a fair or the period of a contested election. All remarked that the scene was highly striking and picturesque and the sun shone without a cloud.
On arriving at the fatal spot the prisoner was assisted to mount the platform where the Chaplain arrayed in his surplice stood ready to receive him. He joined in the prayers with the utmost fervour and devotion but was at times dreadfully agitated. Having concluded the impressive service the Reverend gentleman shook hands with the culprit and asked him if he had anything on his mind which he wished to divulge. Slade said no, he was quite prepared to suffer. The executioner then proceeded to do his duty and having put the fatal noose round the neck of the prisoner adjusted the rope and pulled the cap over his face, he quitted the platform

Joshua then stood alone on the drop and seeming to collect all his energy he said with a firm if faltering voice: “My friends I bid you farewell. I hope you will all take warning by my fate. Remember the wages of sin is death but the gift of God it eternal life through Jesus Christ my Saviour. And now my dear friends I once more bid you farewell, farewell”. The affecting nature of the address and the boyish tone of his voice moved many persons even to tears.

The drop instantly fell and in a few moments the unhappy youth had ceased to exist. He expired without a struggle. The spectators seemed deeply affected by his calm demeanour and untimely fate. After hanging the usual time the body was cut down by the executioner, placed in a coffin and taken back to the prison where it lay till about one o clock on Sunday morning when it was taken to the premises of Mr Wilson surgeon for dissection.

Numbers attended to witness him at work and there was no doubt: one dissection was more of a deterrent to crime than a hundred executions. But the actual dissection of the brain was delayed to allow a greater number of young surgeons from Cambridge to get there.

Next day Joshua’s father made his way to Huntingdon gaol to enquire whether Joshua had left anything for him - any old clothes or doctor's bottles that he might sell. “No”, he was told. But there is money to be made from murder and the definitive narrative of the crime was published by Lovell the printer later in 1827, complete with an engraving of the rectory and that life-like sketch of the perpetrator.

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Not all Huntingdonshire murderers could purge their crimes on the scaffold. Back in 1823 the small community around Pond’s Bridge in Farcet Fen near Ramsey had been horrified by the news of murder of Ann Wright who had been found with her throat cut. What made it even worse was that the eleven-week-old she had been nursing had been taken and laid in its cradle, covered with her blood.

There was no doubt who'd done it – it was her husband, Thomas, who was discovered hiding in a barn near by. There was also no doubt that the poor man was mad. When his case came to court he was acquitted in the grounds of insanity. But what was to be done with him?

For eight years Thomas had been locked up at Huntingdon Gaol and House of Correction. Then just before Christmas 1831 he was removed to a lunatic asylum at Melton, Suffolk where after eighteen months he was assessed as being of sound mind. But, though now officially sane, there was to be no release. Back he went to Huntingdon prison where he was still incarcerated.

But how was he to be treated by the Governor, George Smith. Thomas had, after all, been acquitted. He was therefore confined with the prisoners brought in for trial where despite his notoriety he mixed with all the myriad of petty criminals, old men and young boys awaiting their day in the dock. He had the opportunity to contaminate every man coming into the gaol – in fact he took a positive delight in so doing, for he had nothing else to occupy his time. He remained an evil man and a corruptor, growing worse and worse.

One of those he'd led astray was a lad of previous good character who'd been committed for stealing a pail. It was some time before he came to trial and then was found not guilty. Governor Smith had felt sorry for him and arranged a position as a footman to a Huntingdon surgeon. But his period in gaol had corrupted him and he was shortly back, this time rightly accused of theft.

Nor, as an innocent man, could Thomas be put to work on the treadmill like the convicted villains. Huntingdon gaol had two of these machines on which prisoners laboured, grinding and dressing corn for both prison use and for sale and also pumping water. Some were leading a productive life for their first time and also repaying some of the cost of their confinement for wheat purchased in the open market and ground by the inmates was used to make the bread they consumed.

Some claimed they were too weak to work so Smith had had invented a novel machine of his own, a hand-crank that had been made partly by one of the inmates and partly by a turnkey. It had a screw by which the pressure could be altered, from the power of a child to the power of a giant – Smith judged the correct setting by how much a prisoner perspired whilst working it. And of course it was totally unproductive – it was literally just hard labour. Prisoners who were made to crank this device a thousand revolutions an hour soon asked to go on the treadmill instead!

Thomas, as an innocent man, got an enhanced allowance of food and his family could, if they had the inclination and means, bring him in extra provisions worth two shillings every week, though no beer was allowed.

It all undermined what gaol was about. Governor Smith was convinced that each man should be kept in his own cell, he had 34 single cells and ten capable of taking three or more. But as the number of inmates increased the single cells were now being shared by three people. It made the silence rule impossible to enforce and it was the lack of communication with other prisoners that prioners feared more than the labour of the treadmill.

And the Governor was convinced that prison only worked when sentences were short. After six months of seclusion, restraint, had labour and strict attention to moral and religious instruction by the chaplain, a man or woman was only too pleased to gain their release. But any longer and they became hardened to it and were soon back for more.

So what was going happen to Thomas Wright? Would he stay forever in his privileged position, an example to all the other 50 inmates of how to make the best advantage of the system?

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Huntingdon had not one prison but two; the town gaol never had more than three or four inmates which was just as well as it only had two day rooms and a solitary cell for the use of the men with another room used by female prisoners both as a day-room and a sleeping room. Any that were convicted were sent to the County Gaol.

But as far as Samuel Wells was concerned that gaol should be filled to overflowing with the men who had comprised the Corporation of Huntingdon until it had been swept away under the Municipal Corporation Act of 1835, three years ago, and Lord Sandwich of Hinchingbrooke House who really ran the town

The Common Council had consisted of just thirteen individuals, unelected by anybody except themselves; whenever a vacancy occurred they appointed somebody who shared their own – and his Lordship's - political beliefs. The problem was that they'd had difficulties finding anybody who wanted to do the job; things had got so bad that they'd even approached a political opponent but he'd turned them down.

Not that there were many people qualified to be councillors: there had been just 87 resident burgesses and 70 from outside the town. Sons born to Huntingdon freemen paid an admission fee of two pounds sixteen shillings and twopence, outsiders did the same except the fee was higher and they also had to contribute another £42 into council coffers. Or, if you were really important, the Corporation would grant you the privileges that went with being a freeman: you were exempt from corporate tolls, only paid half fees for a stall on the market and could vote for Huntingdon's two members of Parliament – who were always friends or relations of the Sandwiches

There were twelve Aldermen, each of whom became Mayor in his turn. He was then the coroner, clerk of the market and a magistrate. Not only that, he presided at the quarter sessions and was judge of the court of pleas where he was sole arbiter of disputes over unpaid bills. He was also lord of the leet court which regulated the number of animals to be allowed on the commons – each burgess was entitled to put three cows, two horses and 30 sheep - but that court had not been held for years following a dispute in 1825. For all this he received an annual salary of £30 a year together with two guineas for every inquest.

The Mayor should have been supported by the Recorder, the Marquis of Lothian. But he seldom bothered to make the journey to the town, doubtless thinking that as he was appointed for life there was no need to make an effort. According to the rules the Recorder should be learned in the law; the Marquis wasn't, but he was a member of the House of Lords and the councillors considered that was qualification enough for the forty-shilling salary he received. Third in line was the High Steward, another life-time post usually held by Lord Sandwich or some friend of the family such as his guardian, Mr Poyntz. He too seldom turned up to meetings.

That pushed more work on the Town Clerk who just happened to be the steward to his Lordship. He was supposed to be chosen annually by the Mayor, but in fact it was the same man year after year at a charge of another twenty shillings. Then there was the town gaoler and his wife who together received ten guineas and the beadle who took home seven shillings a week, two watchmen, four parish constables and the town crier – none of them very efficient.

There was one more official – the Chamberlain. He had the job of keeping the accounts but was not much good at it. In fact the corporation finances were very muddled. Not that anybody knew, for the council refused to publish them or let any resident look at the books. When the Government's Corporation Inspectors tried to sort them out they found an annual income of £145 but an expenditure of nearly £200. The Corporation owed the Town Clerk at least £2,700 for his legal expenses and Lord Sandwich £2,000 – though that was not actually entered in the accounts. There was no way or any expectation that they could actually pay this money back.

Much of that expense had come from a protracted battle with Samuel Wells.

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Samuel Wells had been a thorn in the side of Huntingdon councillors for over 25 years; his longest battle had been over one of the town's oldest institutions.

St John's Hospital had been established back in the reign of King Henry II to relieve the poor people of Huntingdon and provide lodgings for pilgrims making their journey to Ely. Over the centuries various people had bequeathed land whose rental income went to support the charity.

The mayor and aldermen were responsible for ensuring that it was well run – and how better to do that than to make the Mayor the Master of the hospital. This meant he received the income which that position paid. It was a perk of the job but in recent years it had jumped from four to £20 and then £30, most of which was spent on corporate entertainment..

But in 1810 Samuel Wells became convinced that the councillors had also taken advantage of their positions to add the hospital's lands to the town commons and had then rented that land off to themselves, paying little or nothing for it. It meant that freemen could put more stock on the common land and this benefited the man who dominated Huntingdon, Lord Sandwich. For during winter months the commons were closed and everybody then had to pay his Lordship for somewhere on which to pasture their animals

Samuel had asked the Corporation to give him details of what had become of the charity's lands, but they had refused, so in a dramatic gesture he had sized the corporation mace, the symbol of their right to govern. He had then complained to Parliament who appointed a Commission of Inquiry. After a lengthy hearing at the George Hotel they confirmed his fears: lands worth a rent of over £790 were being let to councillors for £163. Other burgesses had been allowed to build private houses on charity estates, paying very inferior rents for the privilege. In the years following their report the income from the Hospital's lands had soared even though a couple of tenants had seen their payments reduced: they were those who were not members of the corporation who had been paying too much in the first place.

But it was not the end of the saga for there was still uncertainty over the status of various parcels of ground and a series of legal actions had been commenced to try and decide who owned Spital Close, Broom's Hill Ley or the house where John Cater lived. It was an issue that was dragging on and on, benefiting nobody but the lawyers.

It had cost Samuel Wells over £1,200 out of his own pocket to elicit this information; the Corporation had spent more in trying to stop it being made known. In so doing he had alienated the councillors who had treated him with every possible mark of disgrace; he had, as he put it, been sent Coventry together with Thomas Allnutt and the Rev Mr Bayley who had come forward to give evidence to the Commissioners.

There was another issue too: part of the charity's income went to run a grammar school housed in what had once been the ancient hospital's chapel. It was free for the sons of burgesses and other inhabitants provided they wanted to learn Latin or Greek. But more practical skills such as writing and accounts were an optional extra at a cost of three guineas a year to townsfolk, six guineas to others and even more to boarders. The present master, John Fell, was caught up in the controversy as the Commissioners had taken over the payment of his salary and the school expenses pending the outcome of the legal actions.

Then whilst all this was grinding on the Government's Royal Commission of Inquiry into Municipal Corporations had conducted their own report on the state of the borough of Huntingdon. Their conclusions were damning: only supporters of Lord Sandwich had any prospect of being councillors, there had been improvident management of the funds and disagreements over the stocking of the commons. All of this had lead to a general discontent over the councillors who, although considered men of high character and quite irreproachable as individuals, were very unpopular from the badness of the system. It came of no surprise when the old administration was swept away and a properly-elected council brought in

But what of elections to parliament – that was another battle that Samuel Wells had been waging.

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If municipal politics in Huntingdon was corrupt, parliamentary affairs were even more so.

Huntingdonshire had been under the influence of the Earl of Sandwich and his Montagu family ancestors ever since the reign of Charles II: the family nominated the parliamentary candidates and they were duly elected. There had been occasions when things had not gone smoothly: back in 1701 various electors had been assaulted with clubs and others terrified into not voting against his Lordship's candidates. After that Parliament had decreed that such action was an infringement of the peoples' rights and liberties. Since then the influence had continued to be exercised, though in a less obvious manner

In 1818 the dissolution of parliament had rendered an election necessary and Samuel Wells tried to galvanise Huntingdonshire voters into action. Rising taxes and poor rates as well as soaring crime figures meant that something had to be done, otherwise everybody would be in the workhouse, he urged. Taxation, grinding ruthless taxation had been the cause of the miseries and one of the Huntingdonshire MPs, Mr Fellowes, had always voted for those taxes. He had pledged himself to be an upright independent country gentleman but his words had not been backed up by action. The second candidate, Lord Frederick Montague, had previously retired on the grounds of ill-health and now wanted to return to Westminster.

But there was nobody willing to stand against them, so Samuel Wells proposed Captain William Wells – no relation – as a candidate. He had not actually asked him – how could they ask him to become a candidate and thereby embark in a ruinous and expensive contest. The proposal was warmly greeted and numerous electors backed the idea. Sadly the gallant Captain declined to accept so W.H. Fellowes Esq and Lord Frederick were elected unopposed

There had been change that year in the representation for the borough of Huntingdon as one of the sitting members had decided that advancing years meant that it was time for him to stand down. He recommended that the other sitting member, Mr Calvert should continue to serve and be joined by Captain William Augustus Montagu. They were duly elected and the Earl of Sandwich saw two members of his family returned as MPs for their home area at the same election. .

But things were different in 1825. Then there had been the normal two Sandwich candidates, this time John Calvert and James Stuart. But now Samuel Wells and Henry Sweeting decided it was time to act. They told the mayor that they intended to stand as candidates and on the morning of the election turned up with several supporters. Shortly afterwards the Mayor and corporation, together with the other two nominees and their agents arrived and made their way into a private room. Wells and Sweeting tried to follow them but were refused admission by the hall keeper who'd been given orders to keep them out.

After a while the Mayoral party moved down to the court, where the election was held. However Weston Hatfield, Editor of the Cambridge Independent Press and himself an elector, noticed an important absentee. He asked the Mayor, who was the Returning Officer, why the Recorder, the borough's legal adviser, was not there and who would be acting in his place. The Mayor replied that he would rely on the advice of Mr Maule, the Town Clerk. Hatfield then asked Calvert and Stuart, the Earl's candidates, who was their paid agent and manager of their election. They agreed it was the same George Maule.

When the time came for the election the Mayor called for a show of hands for each candidate separately, as was usual. John Calvert got five votes, James Stuart seven. He then asked for votes for Wells and Sweeting when a much greater number of legal electors held up their hands. Notwithstanding this, and without declaring the numbers, the Mayor consulted with Maule and pronounced that Calvert and Stuart were duly elected!

This was so clearly irregular that Wells petitioned Parliament for an Inquiry. The matter duly came before a Committee of the House of Commons who decided that only the Mayor and Corporation – all 13 of them – had the right to vote for the two members of parliament for Huntingdon. Nobody else counted. Since then however Parliamentary reform had been introduced; now the election for the town's two MPs was open to all 405 qualified voters in the expanded area of Huntingdon and Godmanchester

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Samuel Wells made another try to get himself elected as one of Huntingdon's two Members of Parliament in the election of 1832, once the new Reforms had been introduced, opening up the vote to far more than just the corrupt councillors.

A public meeting was held in the Coffee House to choose who should be the peoples' candidates to stand against those nominated by the Earl of Sandwich. It was a unique gathering, the first of its kind ever to have been held in Huntingdon. All were convinced that this was a turning point for democracy and the old corrupt order would be swept away forever.

Captain James Duberly was one obvious contender, Mr William Harratt, an ironmonger and nonconformist, a second. But were there any others to be considered? It was here that the name of Samuel Wells was mentioned. He was a fen man – born in Chatteris – who had made good. He was a prominent lawyer and Registrar of the Bedford Level Corporation. He had challenged the supremacy of the old order, spoken out against them in Parliament, was acquainted with William Cobbett and had supported the coming of the railways. Surely this was the man who should now take his place in a reformed House of Commons, Robert Fox urged.

But then his opponents turned against him: Wells would not support the Test and Corporation Acts, he was an enemy to Catholic Emancipation and had opposed the abolition of negro slavery, they claimed. Despite this attack the meeting supported his candidature at which

William Harratt, who had already been nominated, declared that he wanted nothing more to do with elections and asked for his name to be removed from the lists, which lead to the meeting breaking up amidst great noise and hissing.

Once properly nominated Wells and Duberly started their campaign, confident that the sitting members, Jonathan Peel and Jonathan Frederick Pollock were obnoxious to the majority of the majority of the electors and it was time for change. But things did not work out that way; whilst the gallant soldier, Captain Duberly of Gains Hall who had fought at the Battle of Waterloo was universally respected, Samuel Wells had ruffled too many feathers, there were too many rumours of his immoral or unseemly habits and of him having fathered a bastard child in Godmanchester.

When the count was taken the old order had been returned. Jonathan Peel rejoined three of his brothers in the parliamentary chamber and watched as his father became Prime Minister whilst Pollock was soon appointed Attorney General in Sir Robert Peel's first cabinet. It went to show that it would take more than parliamentary reform the challenge the power of the Sandwiches.

The titles of Earl of Sandwich, Baron Montagu of St Neots with Viscount Hinchingbrooke for the elder son, had been granted in 1660 to the prominent naval commander Admiral Sir Edward Montagu who had brought Charles II back to England following the Restoration of the Monarchy. More recently John, the fourth Earl, had sponsored the voyage of discovery made by Captain Cook which had discovered the islands now named after him. As First Lord of the Admiralty he had rebuilt the English Navy spending long hours at his desk with little time for anything to eat but some slices of beef between a couple of pieces of bread – though others claimed that it had been his addiction to gambling that ensured the family's fame in matters pertaining to food.

Locally he had financed the rebuilding of Huntingdon Town Hall following the fire of 1743, presenting two magnificent portraits as decoration, one of Queen Caroline, the other of himself. His mansion at Hinchingbrooke had entertained the great and the good. But privately there had been tragedy and that tragedy had become very public indeed.

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The fourth Earl Sandwich, John, had worked hard at his Admiralty duties despite his domestic problems: his wife Dorothy suffered from progressing mental problems and was eventually declared insane.

But life at the family's Hinchingbrooke House was often one of music and culture. Lord Sandwich possessed great powers of song and played the kettle drums. During Christmas week oratorios were performed by the greatest musicians of the day attended by prominent members of the musical world.

Amongst those who regularly attended was an attractive young actress, Miss Martha Ray. Gossips reported that the two had met after his Lordship saw her in a shop in Tavistock Street where he was purchasing some neckcloths and it was obvious that it was not just her fine voice that attracted him. It was said that she had been driven onto the stage following the financial failure of her father, a woollen draper, and that she had soon attracted a number of admirers. But it was the Earl of Sandwich who was her true love. They lived together discretely for 17 years and to him she bore five children without the security of a marriage service.

Things changed after Lord Sandwich invited his neighbour, Major Reynolds, to take dinner at Hinchingbrooke. The Major sought permission to bring a brother officer, Captain James Hackman, with him. It was a small party: Lord Sandwich, Miss Ray and a lady with her, the two military gentlemen and one other. Dinner was soon served and coffee called for. Afterward they played two rubbers at whist when Lord Sandwich held with Miss Ray against Major Reynolds and the other lady, Captain Hackman requesting that he might only look over the cards. Afterwards Lord Sandwich being much fatigued and complaining of a head ache retired early.

Captain Hackman was recruiting in Huntingdonshire and for the next few weeks seemed to be regularly in the company of Miss Ray, who shortly enlisted the Earl's assistance in getting the gallant Captain a change of profession, from soldier to clergyman. There was little unusual in this: Martha was always seeking favours and Sandwich was happy to use his patronage to please her.

Miss Ray continued her stage career and Mr Hackman was often noticed in a box, joining in the appreciation of her undoubted talent. At other times Miss Ray herself was in the audience with one of her lady friends and would depart afterwards in his Lordship's coach. However by now more gossip was flying about, together with scurrilous ballads and cries from the mob. But it was not the mob she had to fear.

One evening Martha and Mrs Berkley had gone to the Covent Garden Playhouse. As they left Captain Hackman suddenly rushed out from the door of a coffee house opposite and two pistol shots rang out. Miss Ray fell dying, the Captain was badly wounded by a bullet from his own gun. He confessed in a letter to a friend: "I am alive – and she is dead. I shot her, and not myself. Some of her blood and brains is still upon my cloaths … come hither and bring me a little poison, such as is strong enough …". He was found guilty and sentence to death at Newgate. The scandal was immense, made even worse with the publication of correspondence between the Captain and the Earl's lady, much of it written whilst she was at Hinchingbrooke House, Huntingdon

When the tragic news was first broken to Lord Sandwich he refused to believe it: "You know that I forbade you to plague me any more about those ballads let them sing or say whatever they please about me". But when convinced of its truth he stood petrified before seizing a candle and rushing up to his bed in an agony of grief from which he never recovered.

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Despite his prominent position in Society, the fourth Earl of Sandwich had never been able to make much money and was always having to take out loans from people including the Prince of Wales, himself not a model of financial acumen.

His son, the 5th Earl acceded in 1792 but like his father he was unlucky in love. He married his cousin, the daughter of the 2nd Earl of Halifax, only for her to die after two years leaving him with a young son who soon followed her to the grave. So he'd wed again, this time Lady Mary Henrietta Powlett, daughter and co-heir of the Duke of Bolton, and it was the eldest son of this marriage, George, who'd succeeded to the title in 1814.

Keeping up the family tradition, George married the daughter of an Earl and produced two children. The second was a boy they named John William who had become head of the Sandwich dynasty at the tender age of seven, when he was far too young to become concerned about political or other matters.

So it had been his mother, the Dowager Countess Louisa who had influenced activities until that grand day in 1832 when John had celebrated his coming of age with a dinner for 280

people in the Huntingdon Town Hall, scene of much of the family's manipulation. He'd also taken his seat in the House of Lords and had just married Lady Mary, daughter of Field Marshal Henry Paget, 1st Marquess of Anglesey. He was now Master of Hinchingbrooke House, but it was not the house of old.

For in the early hours of the morning of 22nd January, 1830 while the young Earl was at Trinity College and his mother was in Rome, disaster struck. Two female servants were alerted that the house was ablaze. By then it was too late, the flames already issuing through the windows with awful grandeur and ascending in immense volumes. It seemed the whole building would be lost but Edward Maule, Town Clerk of Huntingdon and Sandwich's steward, took control. With the help of fire engines from Huntingdon, Godmanchester, Buckden and St Neots he managed to confine the destruction to the North-East corner and even there the external walls remained standing.

It was a scene of immense confusion. Splendid furniture was scattered about outside, much of it mutilated by too hasty removal. Marble chimney pieces and tablets were torn from the walls, paintings by Van Dyck, Sir Peter Lely, Zoffani, Hogarth and other old masters were thrown out with the beds and mattresses. The splendid library was piled in one mass upon the snow while all the beautifully painted glass that could be torn from the windows was lying about in various directions, much of it shattered and broken.

Nor was everybody helping; the mob came from St Neots and every village for ten miles around, many of them intent on mischief. Some blackguards took away the pump handles and cut the pipes to stop the water reaching the flames. Women and children broke into the cellar at the foot of the back stairs and drank all the champagne they could find. Seeing this Maule took immediate action, sending three barrels of beer to the onlookers as a cheaper way of fuelling their celebrations at the tragedy affecting an ancient family who had stoked up so much resentment locally.

The news was conveyed to the young Earl who was anxious to return to Hinchingbrooke but was told that he would be far better attending to his studies in Cambridge. Maule it was who handled things; receiving over £6,500 from the insurance he employed forty or fifty workmen to secure the house against the weather. It was not until 1832 when the Countess returned from Rome that any serious attention was given to the rebuilding of the mansion. Mother and son were anxious to retain as much as possible of the old features but were equally keen to be frugal. So they employed the architect Edward Blore who came up with a scheme which kept most of the external features including the Great Bow Window and created a fine new drawing room, butler's pantry and housekeeper's room. It gave the house back its grandeur, but it kept the bills down. And anyway the Hinchingbrooke dynasty of Montagus could never hope to match their cousins at Kimbolton Castle.

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Another branch of the Montagu family, the Dukes of Manchester, had a large, though ugly, seat at Kimbolton castle. Its most famous feature was not the architecture nor the furnishings but the cellar. Visitors were always taken down there to be handed a glass tube more than two feet long filled with beer. Many a gentleman accepted the challenge of downing it in one go only to find that at the last swallow the remainder of the liquid rushed out into his face. This very strong beer was still brewed with the same quantity of materials as it had been for the last hundred years.

It had fortified many a Montagu. Lord Frederick had retired from the army as a Lieutenant Colonel, then gone on to fight other battles in parliament – inevitably as a member for Huntingdonshire - till ill health forced him to stand down. But he had stood up again at the

next election for a brief time. While he was able he strenuously supported the interest of the agriculturist and as strenuously opposed every innovation both in Church and State.

He died in 1827 while visiting his mother at her residence in Berkeley Square. His remains were conveyed from London in great solemnity. The cortege was met at Eaton Socon by several friends of the family with more Gentlemen joining the procession at Staughton in their respective carriages, while his entrance to the church for the funeral itself was headed by a large number of his tenants. The service had been performed by the Lord Bishop of Lincoln before his remains were deposited in the silent tomb with every mark of respect and esteem from the great multitude present.

But his death had been overshadowed by that of the Rev Mr Codling who on Easter Sunday 1812 had been preaching from the 118th psalm. He'd read the verses

"I shall not die but live and declare the works of the Lord.
The Lord hath chastened me sore;
But he hath not given me over unto death.
Open unto me the gates of righteousness;
I will go into them and I will praise the Lord"

when suddenly he stopped short, exclaimed "I can't, I can't!", sunk down in the pulpit and died

Kimbolton's most famous death had been centuries earlier when the castle was home to Catharine of Aragon following her divorce from Henry VIII. Whilst there she devoted her life to piety, she confessed and fasted, arose at midnight to pray and received a weekly communion. But her constitution, originally weak, soon sunk under the severities of her life and she believed the air of Huntingdonshire prejudicial to her health. Plans had been put in hand for her removal to Fotheringay castle but it was too late.

In her final days Queen Catharine had adopted a plain dress – not something followed by the present Lady Kimbolton. She was a keen follower of fashion who had recently gone shopping on the Continent. There she went into a shop in Paris and asked a sight of their best Brussels lace veils. She was shown some which suited her taste and she asked the price. Forty guineas was the lowest! She thought it high but paid over the money and took the article.

A fortnight afterwards she set out for England but was faced by a dilemma: how was she to prevent the magnificent veil being seized by the excise officers as smuggled goods? She thought the better way would be to wear it when crossing the Channel and so she did. But her ploy failed and it was seized on her arrival. Her regret was extreme: all her visions of making a dashing appearance with it at once fled for ever.

Worse was to follow for in a few minutes the customs officer returned and put the veil back into her hands. But the delight was quickly dashed when the official said "Here madam is your veil. On a closer inspection we find it is not of Brussels but of British manufacture" .

The Parisian shopkeeper had done Lady Kimbolton! He had imported the article from England at less than a tenth part of the price at which he sold it to her! Her Ladyship was now as much mortified at the imposition practised on her as she had been grieved when the veil was seized by the custom house officer. But worse was the realisation that her discomfiture would be gossiped about in houses across the land.

Whilst the country gentry were gossiping about Brussels lace, the home-made silk industry was in decline, not least at Haverhill. There were about 70 silk looms in that town which wove umbrella and parasol silk for Mr Walters of Spitalfields for which they were paid about sixpence per yard. Since a man could produce 16 yards a week it gave him wages of between eight and ten shillings during the summer, though this dropped in winter when they wove parasol silk, Elliott Smith explained.

For the most part the silk weavers were a decent, well-behaved and well-meaning body of men. But there were another class of weavers: those employed in making drabbett, a mixture of hemp and cotton cloth – the hemp from Leeds, the coarse twill cotton from Stockport – which was used for making smock frocks for farmers' men or as undress for grooms and other gentlemen's servants. Drabbet has been made at Haverhill for about 25 years; previously fustians had been manufactured, a similar but finer fabric, and checks of blue and white squares had also been woven, but not so now.

A man can weave a chain, or forty yards, in a week, women, boys and girls usually about half that. The weaver has to find his own loom and harness which is worth about four guineas and while the loom will last a man a lifetime, the cords of the harness require constant mending and renewing. With the usual expenses for winding and candles, as well as finding dressing to put on the warp, it adds up a wage of six shillings a week for a drabbet weaver.

The drabbet is then dyed an olive, slate or drab colour by a dyer who gets half-a-crown a day and some beer but it is unpleasant work: he is often wet and has great expense for clothes and shoes.

All in all it is a low income even when compared to a farmer's labourer who has other advantages such a piece of ground where he can grow potatoes and cabbages and keep a pig. But when asked why they work for so low wages and do not take to any other employment, weavers plead their poverty. They have no club or fund to fall back on if they strike for better wages so must take what is given to them. One man said that he had a wife and eight children; if he held out only for a week or two his children would be crying for bread. Boys were still brought up to the trade; it was not good for them but what else to be done.

They'd sought the assistance from the Guardians of the Poor but there was nothing they could do as the Poor-Law Commissioners at Somerset House had specifically forbidden the payment of out-door relief to the able-bodied labourer, no matter how poignant his sufferings may be. Some people claim that the weavers might do more work if they exerted themselves and say they're always drunk but the very small amount of wages they earn puts that vice beyond their reach.

The whole industry was in decline. Fifty years ago there had also been looms weaving woollen for the neighbouring farmers – that was in the days when the farmers' wives and daughters amused themselves with spinning after their day's work. But now they spend their time at music and the woollen manufacture has all but gone from the area. Until recently there were about 450 looms in Haverhill of which 150 were worked by men, 100 by boys and 100 by girls. Now it's down to 400, 330 for drabbets and 70 for silk and at Christmas 1836 about 100 of them were out of work

If things continued as they were then the weavers would be following the example of the agricultural labourers who'd revolted back in 1830. Then men from Withersfield armed with scythes and flails had marched on Haverhill demanding that farmers raised wages. They'd been encouraged by the elusive 'Captain Swing' until Mr Brown had caught him: he'd been in Stradishall when he noticed a man in a green gig pass some papers to a woman. He demanded to see them and found they were threats signed 'Swing'. Brown galloped after the gig to Stoke-by-Clare and arrested the driver. When he was searched more papers were found

hidden in his boots and he had also more than £580 in guineas and banknotes. Since the arrest other incendiary letters had come to light and he was linked to the incendiarism of some stacks at Barton. The 'Captain' – real name Joseph Saville – was a travelling evangelist from Luton who dealt with tradesmen in the straw-plait line; he did not deny distributing letters but claimed he was actuated by religious motives

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If one journeyman had been intent in destroying Haverhill, another was keen that the charm of his town should be appreciated. John Webb was a weaver and one of those country poets born in obscurity who never had any of the benefits of education. But he had the wisdom to employ his talent without letting it interrupt his daily toil, for like so many of his townspeople he had a family to feed, and verses did not fill an empty stomach

His poems received complimentary notices in some of the most far-flung journals. His most praised piece was one dedicated to his home town which soon sold out. Others saw only a small market town whose principle long wide street was lined with mean and shabby houses and adorned with one unremarkable church, the ruins of another and fragments of a castle. But to Webb Haverhill "Yon lovely spot, where once rude nettles grew, Presents a little Eden to the view"

Some verses were dedicated to local townsfolk including Ambrose Gurteen, one of the family of substantial weavers whose Haverhill Manufactory issued their own tokens which were accepted as tender by local shopkeepers in the years when small change was hard to find. Ambrose became proficient in the medical profession for some years before he had the misfortune to lose an eye after which he became a recluse, spending most of his time in fruitless attempts to find out the longitude, build castles in the air or other eccentricities before dying in the most abject poverty, ending his life in a miserable shed.

Webb also immortalised other unfortunates, including James Chambers, the Soham peddler-poet and a matchseller - an "abject squalid form upon whose faded cheek so ghastly pale dull grief has plough'd deep furrows". His tale was one of woe: born a cripple he had the further misfortune to have his father die at an early age and the family slump into poverty. He had found himself a wife and their union was blessed with two children, only for the lad to die of a fever and the girl to drown in a pond whilst gathering May flowers. Such a double tragedy caused his wife to lose her mind; for seven years he nursed her, despite her foul language and obscene curses, till she at last found peace in the grave, leaving him to wander alone, earning a crust from the sale of his matches and grateful for small kindnesses.

Nor did the clergy in nearby villages escape Webb's attention. One poem was devoted to the 'draggled-tail parson', the Rev John Whitmore who lived in Helions Bumpstead. He had attended Caius College and became a minister before his mind became deranged through drink and a lost love – a common theme in Haverhill life it seemed! What made it worse was that Whitmore himself conducted the wedding service of the woman who had spurned him and her preferred lover. He then lived a secluded life in the house of an elderly widow where he spent his time reading and preaching sermons – with no congregation save himself. A tall and comely man, he wore a long blue great coat and a large wig and walked to Haverhill once a week to have his face and head shaved, always bathing the latter with some gin after the operation. He was once asked by a neighbouring clergyman to marry a couple for him but declined, saying he did not choose to encumber himself with other people's curses, and did no clerical duties except occasionally burying a corpse

At one village funeral Webb described the scene:

Behold the village priest, in vestments white,

Reads o'er the dead the sacred solemn rite!
In humbler guise the clerk appears behind,
Whose countenance betrays few 'marks of mind';
Whose heart, by custom harden'd into stone,
Heeds not the woe-fraught sigh or plaintive moan.
He views the gazing throng with vacant ken,
And gives, as office bids, the loud Amen'

There was no doubt where Webb himself wanted to end his days:

O, when that fatal stroke, that general doom,
Shall stop my shuttle, tear me from my loom!
Dear, native Vale! thy flowery turf beneath,
May he, who sang thy praise, repose in death!
I ask no sculptur'd stone, no verse sublime,
To shield my memory from the blast of time;
But may that friend, whom most my heart holds dear,
Bedew my grassy hillock with a tear

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Haverhill was an industrial town beyond the pleasant rolling hills of eastern Cambridgeshire, but it was approached by villages which boasted the designation 'West'. For an auctioneer it could be easy to muddle West Wickham and West Wratting, Westley Waterless and Weston Colville. But Elliott Smith had ways of remembering them: West Wratting was the village whose gossip revolved around two wills, one of a man, one of a horse, and an ancient illegal marriage.

The man was Joseph Ellam who in his will had tried to be concise as to what he wanted done with his fortune. He left various legacies and property to his brother's son – also named Joseph - but it was the house in which he'd lived that was the cause of the dispute. He'd willed it to Mary Westley, the youngest daughter of a couple who'd lived with him, together with all his household goods and chattels which she could dispose of as she wished. But had he meant the house to be hers to give away too, or should it pass to his nephew after Mary died? It was a point of law that led to prolonged dispute until it had been finally settled in the Court of King's Bench, at considerable expense.

By contrast the horse's will was simpler!

Bridle Snap was a brown horse foaled in 1750 who'd caused an upset at the Newmarket spring meeting of 1756 when he beat the Duke of Cumberland's Marske and won 1000 guineas in the process. It was a feat Snap repeated the next year after which he went on to achieve other victories at good odds. Everybody agreed he was a very fine horse of a beautiful shape and great power who was equal if not superior to any horse of his time. After his racing career ended he went to stud, first in Northumberland and Yorkshire then at Newmarket, earning 50 guineas for each cover. In the next twenty one years two hundred and sixty one of his sons and daughters were winners of over £92,000. Then he retired to West Wratting where he died in July 1777.

His obituary read:

Died at his seat at West Wratting Cambridgeshire aged twenty seven years Childers Snap Esq who has left a numerous progeny which have shone with lustre in their generations. He had

many favourite sons the most distinguished of which is Goldfinder who most inherits his father's blood. His eldest son Omnium was unfortunate in his youth by getting lame otherwise would have been his father's darling, nevertheless he has not disgraced his great progenitor and has improved the family estate.

Mr Snap had many favourite daughters among whom was Angelica married early to Tartar Herod Esq by whom she had Charles Evergreen Esq, a gentleman of great merit now residing at Leverington near Wisbeach. Also Snapdragon who produced the hero Grey Robin by Gimcrack that won the 5,500 guineas at Newmarket second spring meeting 1777.

He has left many valuable legacies to his different relations but the bulk of his fortune amounting to upwards of £30,000 he generously distributed in his life time to his patrons the Shafto family. His seat at West Wratting he has bequeathed to his favourite daughter Angelica for life, where she is now resident.

His owner, Jeninson Shafto, was the Member of Parliament for Leominster and one of the most famous racehorse owners of his age. A prominent and colourful figure on the turf, his taste for wagers and his luck were legendary. He once bet that he could ride fifty miles in under two hours; he used ten horses and won with forty-three seconds to spare. At West Wratting he built stables for the horses and a house for his training groom which was later sold to the Duke of Bedford who had extended the house so it was fit for his own occasional use during the Newmarket meetings.

But the principal gossip in West Wratting's history revolved around the Dalton family commemorated by a memorial in the church. Michael Dalton had been a famous lawyer in the reign of Queen Elizabeth who took for his second wife, Mary, the daughter of Sir Giles Alington of Horseheath. It was the incestuous marriage of their daughter, Dorothy to her uncle that caused the greatest scandal. Sir Giles had been fined £12,000 in the Court of Star Chamber in 1631 and they had both been made to do penance in Great St Mary's church. Sir Giles also had to promise never to cohabit or be in private with his niece – his wife – again, on pain of another £20,000 fine. That caused another problem for the people drawing up wills!

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West Wickham, to Elliott Smith the auctioneer, was the place where 'No Man's Acre' and 'No Woman's Acre'' had disappeared from the map following Inclosure. They should have been let to produce income for the poor together with 'Madam's Land' - given many years before by a maiden lady for the same purpose - which had also been misplaced by the time he had accompanied the Charity Commissioners in their tour of inspection. But then even the church did not know what land was part of their parish, the Rector of Withersfield having claimed back about 66 acres that had somehow found its way into West Wickham's parish.

All that was odd, given that there was a famous land surveyor living in the vicinity.

Charles Wedge had made his name working for Rennie when the canal-building boom had been at its height. He had given evidence to the enquiry about extending the proposed canal from London to Bishop's Stortford up through the fens with a branch canal to Burwell Lode and another to the Abingtons and Babraham. Wedge – then living at Gazeley – had been certain that it would have been a successful enterprise, reducing the price of commodities. The only problem was that it would have cost about £170,500 to dig and they were still

£100,000 short of the money. It was little wonder when Parliament rejected the Bill to allow its construction.

Afterwards he'd become involved in the large number of enclosures that were being pushed through including the parishes of Kennet, Higham, Wood Ditton and Fordham. So when West Wickham Inclosure Act had been passed in 1811 Wedge had been appointed as one of the commissioners to ensure that all the various claims and counterclaims were properly considered and the procedures carried through effectively. Such a job needed men of great integrity and they considered themselves fortunate in having him living nearby.

But then things had started to go wrong.

Under the Fordham Inclosure Act the expenses of passing and executing the award – making new roads and drains and so on - had to be paid out of the first money raised by the commissioners. To defray these expenses Wedge and the other commissioners appointed bankers – in this case Hammonds of Newmarket. For six years things went smoothly, the bank advancing over £3,000 without getting any return. But then the commissioners raised a rate to cover the expense of drainage; not much of it was paid, but none of it went to the bankers. So they started to charge interest on the money they'd advanced.

The Fordham Inclosure meetings were generally held at Newmarket and Wedge was in the habit of taking the banking book to Hammonds to have the account made up. No objection was ever made to the charges until 1818 when the books were audited for the first time and the auditor started to query the interest payments. The question was whether the credit had been given to the commissioners personally or to the Inclosure fund. The matter had gone to court which found Wedge and his fellow commissioner personally liable for the debt.

More recently he'd become involved in another lengthy legal battle, this time involving irregularities over the inclosure of the parish of Kennet where there were allegations of serious failings which could have rendered the whole award invalid.

He also had financial problems within his family. Charles Wedge had a number of sons one of whom was Rector of Burrough Green but two others, John and Edward, had become farmers only to find themselves in difficulties during the agricultural recession at the end of the Napoleonic Wars. They'd decided to make a new life in Australia and were apparently doing well, especially John who had followed his father's profession and obtained the post of assistant surveyor in Van Diemen's Land. Recently John had returned to stay with his father who was now an elderly gentleman in his 90's and was facing further enquiries over the way he'd administered charities at Shudy Camps and Westley Waterless.

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Being a Charity Trustee could be a thankless task, Elliot Smith explained. They had to administer schemes that had been set up centuries before, when circumstances were very different to those applying in this, the first year of Queen Victoria's reign, and try to ensure that any income was properly applied to what approximated to the original donor's wishes. Yet no matter how hard the Trustees tried they were always open to criticism – as had been heaped on Charles Wedge in connection with some lands at Shudy Camps.

Nobody knew how the village charity had become the possessor of a pasture of about eight acres called Manages. But everybody agreed it had always been let by the trustees with the income used to relieve the poor of the parish as the churchwardens thought best.

In 1783 the Rev Samuel Peck had appointed Thomas Bridge Little and Charles Wedge as co-trustees with him and for forty years things proceeded smoothly. The rules said that the Manages was not to be broken up or ploughed, so it was always let for grazing sheep at low rent. But when in 1822 the sheep owners gave up the trustees agreed to let the land to Mrs Dayrell, the Lady of the Manor, for three years. They also agreed that she might divide it up into allotments to be let for the benefit of the poor.

Fences were erected and two roads laid out across it, one to an inclosure called Stockings, the property of Captain John Hatley of the Royal Navy, the other to two fields called the Northeys belonging to the Captain and Mrs Dayrell. This one ran round the edge of the plot and took the place of a right-of-way across the field that they'd traditionally enjoyed.

Then once the allotments had been created on the Manages, Mrs Dayrell underlet them to 21 villagers. You'd have thought they would be pleased to have an area they could use to feed their families. But instead they objected to the new road to the Stockings Field and brought an action of trespass at the Cambridge assizes, which they won.

At this Captain Hatley took umbrage and petitioned the Court of Chancery demanding that the land should revert back to what it had been before the changes – put back to grass – and that Wedge and Little should be removed as trustees. The Court decided it would not be for the benefit of the Charity to convert the Manages back to pasture and it could continue to be let as allotments. The trustees should divide the rents and profits among the poor, provided no one person got more than ten shillings a year. If there was any money left over it was to be spent on clothing, coals or provisions that could be given away or sold at a low price. Proper accounts were to be kept and audited.

But Charles Wedge was criticised for his part in the negotiations; he was dismissed as a trustee and new people were appointed to run the charity.

While the question of the right of road to Stockings was being fought out the allotment holders paid no rent to Mrs Dayrell and she in turn did not pay the trustees. As a consequence the charity lost income and the poor suffered. Since her lease expired Manages has been in the hands of the parish officers who have grown barley on it though the once excellent land has deteriorated as crop after crop has been taken with no return of manure.

However the full costs of the legal action, nearly £200, were to be paid out of the charity, and that caused great resentment. So the new vicar, Rev John Hailstone, undertook to negotiate with the solicitor who had represented Captain Hatley. This man, George Freer, was a relation of the Captain and had now succeeded to the disputed land. He's agreed to give back half the costs due to him provided the villagers promise not to question the Northey road - it really is only a minor encroachment and the cost of yet another court case would be so prohibitively expensive that it would be best left as it is.

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The unfortunate Charles Wedge had also found himself involved in another dispute over charities, this one at Westley Waterless.

There Heneage Finch, the 5th Earl Aylesford, whose family owned extensive estates in Middlesex, Suffolk and Cambridgeshire, had sought his help in ensuring that the inclosure act was supported by older parishioners. Wedge had done so by ensuring that the village charity received double the rent for some lands let to Finch – and as that income went to provide beef for the poor they were very pleased to endorse the scheme.

Sadly his Lordship had then died, having changed his will at the last moment and all his property had to be sold. This got so complicated that a Private Bill was introduced in the House of Lords and the proceedings dragged on for some time before the matter was resolved. During the dispute the widow of a previous rector, Ann Varenne, took away the title deeds for security – and now they've gone missing. She claims she returned them to the new rector, Rev John Bluck, but he denied ever having seen them!

You'd have thought that a church would be the obvious place to store ancient records, but not even they are safe. In May 1823 the tower of Weston Colville church tumbled down at about eight o'clock in the evening smashing four of its five bells. Part of the masonry fell on the roof of the nave, crashing through and destroying the seats and pews. It was fortunate that nobody was near; if it had happened during Divine Service many of the congregation would inevitably have lost their lives. It had been quite a problem for the new minister, William Acton, but he'd worked tirelessly to have it rebuilt.

Such a project costs money, but money was not a problem for the gentry whose remains were buried within Weston's ruined church. Theirs was a most interesting story.

John Carter had succeeded his father as the village's Squire in 1759. He was a little man who'd lost an eye and failed to father any children. But fortune favoured him when an elderly cousin, Miss Elizabeth Pollard, died. She bequeathed him a fortune on one condition: that he change his name to Carter Pollard. It was little enough to ask and was soon accomplished.

Now a wealthy man he acquired most of the parish following the inclosure and seemed set for a peaceful life. However as he had money he decided to see the world and sold the estate to his brother-in-law, General Thomas Hall.

John Carter Pollard and his wife travelled extensively until luck turned against them. They got embroiled in the mayhem of the French Revolution him and both died in a Paris prison. That was not the last that the residents of Weston Colville were to hear of him.

Some years later General Hall's son received a visit from a French priest with an incredible tale. He told how he had ministered to the Carter Pollards before they'd died of natural causes in their cell. On their deathbed they'd told how they'd buried their silver plate in a chest in the garden of their Paris home and begged him to take it back to Weston Colville, together with their own bodies.

The priest agreed. He unearthed the plate and managed to place it and their corpses in three long boxes which he contrived to get safe to the coast where he found a boat prepared to transport them all to England. But the weather turned stormy and by the time they reached land the priest was soaked to the skin. What was worse his pocket book also become saturated and the only words he could read were 'Hall, Cambridge'.

Finally arriving in the University town he took a room at the Bird Bolt Hotel where he locked up his boxes and started to search for the only clue he had, the name 'Hall, Cambridge'

There were many contenders. Trinity Hall, Clare Hall were quickly eliminated. But out in the surrounding countryside were many mansions. He set off to visit Wimpole Hall, Hildersham Hall and many others, but none of the occupants could claim any connections with a family named Carter Pollard. Then he'd arrived at Weston.

It had been quite a journey for a French priest, transporting three long boxes containing two bodies and a large quantity of silver plate from Paris. Even when he'd arrived in Cambridge his quest was far from over, for he had to find somebody to claim descent to the corpses he'd conveyed across the channel. He had written down the address in his pocket book but the ink had washed away in the storms and the only words he could read were 'Hall, Cambridge"

Eventually the priest arrived at the door of General John Hall at West Wratting who was able to prove his connection with the bodies in the box. Together they made their way to Cambridge and brought back the Carter Pollards to rest at peace in the family vault in Weston Colville church. The French priest was rewarded with payment of £1,000 for his pains and returned regularly to stay in Cambridgeshire.

The two men had much to talk about, for John Hall knew Paris - indeed he had been in the city during the storming of the Bastille and knew the prison where the Pollards had died. On one visit the priest brought with him his Irish-French nephew, Michael Dwyer. Dwyer was anxious for a position at sea and General Hall was able to use his influence to secure him a commission. But the lad repaid his kindness by running away with the General's daughter!

Not that John Hall could complain too much. He himself was a married man with seven children, all of them illegitimate. For he had fallen in love with Mrs Elizabeth Barker whose husband had deserted her. But nobody could prove that he had died and so marriage had not been possible. The two had lived as man and wife at the family home until she'd died, aged 35. He then married Elizabeth Haylock of Dullingham.

Now with his money worries behind him, John could pursue another of his loves: hawking a set of six long-winged hawks with which he hunted partridges. He indulged in all the trappings of the sport, dressing his falconer, a Dutchman called James Bots, in the correct attire. When he passed with his hawk on his hand the villagers stood and stared.

They were also aware of his generosity to the local community. He tried to ensure that every cottage had a bright coal fire at Christmas time – may heaven bless him and crown his latter days with joy and peace - was a sentiment widely expressed. But heaven could spare him for a few years more, they hoped.

For Colville was a village of old men, lonely old men. As the years progressed so one by one former school friends were added to the unmarked graves in the churchyard – no need of memorial, who would ever forget them. They had so often followed the slow funeral train to the opened grave, to stand upon the heap of earth and stones mixed up with fragments of long-buried bones and think of those who previously stood just there as they too witnessed the final earthly appearance of a loved friend.

Then, turning away, their downcast eyes might spot a brown and fleshless skull, the eyeless sockets full of dust, and wonder who he was and what his life – was he a man of peace, or man of strife. Was he some hectoring bully of the green, or did he love the calm and quiet scene. Was he a man of toil, by want oppressed, longing to lie down and be at rest. Or did he toil and get to save, only to find his riches could not keep him from the grave. Nobody now knew.

But one would not be easily forgotten, for farmer Smoothy had made his money only to die at the young age of 44. It was the manner of his death that was remembered, for his shoes had hurt his feet. But rather than take them to the cobbler for repair he had continued to wear them until some infection entered the open wound and rapid mortification had ensued, which ended his days. Yet the village had a cobbler's shop that was the centre of community life.

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In many ways Weston Colville was a pleasant place in which to live, according to Elliott Smith

The village pub could not afford a proper inn sign, but the three horse shoes branded on the board proclaimed its purpose just as well. Inside, beside the fireplace old men sat over their mugs of beer and remembered when they were young, singing the old songs such as 'Lord Bateman', 'Spanking Jane' and 'Black-eyed-Sue'. But they also lamented how things were different from the days of their youth now the old footpaths had been ploughed up and the fields where they had rambled were now denied them.

Each year its fair saw stalls made of doors placed on beer barrels on which penny whistles, sweets and cakes baked by elderly village women vied for the carefully-hoarded halfpences of local children, their eyes almost as large as saucers at the delights before them. Usually a ring was erected on the green where wrestlers tugged and tussled to fling their opponents, urged on by the increasingly violent language of workers whose tongues were loosened by somewhat more potent beers than that supplied at the Horseshoes

Once the fair had departed life for the children settled back to normality till the village ponds froze when winter came, providing an opportunity for them to slip and slide till the ice melted and they were left with dripping clothes and water gushing from soddened shoes, afraid to go home.

Then it was time to dry their clothes beside the roaring fire in the blacksmith's shop while they watched the smithy at work, the anvil echoing with his blows, the bellows roaring the coals to ever greater heat. But the rotted shoes were the giveaway that parents would be sure to spot. Even here all was not lost

Across the green was the home of the shoemaker, Robert Withers, where many pairs of heavy boots were made. Late into the night his window gleamed with candlelight, yet he was always one of the first at work in the morning. In that hospitable cottage was a cage containing a squirrel, another with a magpie, to fascinate the youngsters while the walls were pasted with ballads which were known by heart by all who visited, whether they could read or not.

It was there when winter nights were dark and cold that plough boys met and told their news and scandal – whose horses looked well, and whose looked bad, who was a handy, who an awkward lad; what girl had left her place and gone to town, and who in silks and satins had come down – she looked so fine, and talked in such a strain, that hardly her old friends knew her again. But should any nod off in the company they were likely to wake to find themselves stuck fast to the bench by cobbler's glue.

One of the things that had occupied the gossiper had been the sad fate of W. Hart of Brinkley. He'd been was a dedicated bellringer who, despite being 76 years of age, had arisen at four in the morning to attend the opening of a peal of bells at Castle Camps. But when his son arrived to fetch him, an hour later, he found the man dead. His funeral was one that would be remembered, for he'd expressed a wish to be buried in the belfry of Brinkley church. And so it came to pass: his remains were deposited there, attended by numbers of ringers while a dumb peal was rung on the bells he'd loved so much. Similar peals had been rung in nearly all the churches in the vicinity for the next 10 days, such was the respect for this upright and universally respected gentleman

They respected Squire Frost of Brinkley too, but even that family had found itself in problems over who should inherit what.

The problem at Brinkley had been that the Frosts liked to keep the same Christian name, William. Thus when William Frost had died he'd left a will specifying that his estate should pass to his son, William. However that William died young without time to father a successor son so the estate went to his sister, a Mrs King. But his widow challenged the ruling and it all ended up in court with the family's money going to lawyers.

It was potentially much worse at Dullingham where the area has been dominated by the Jeafferson family for generations, and for generations they used the Christian name of Christopher for the first-born.

They included Christopher the West India planter, Christopher the Cambridge Member of Parliament and Christopher the Lieutenant-General. He let the family down when he died in 1824 as he only left a daughter – not even named Christine, but Harriet. She'd married William Pigott in 1827 and died a few months ago in March 1838 in a hotel in Paris– but not before they'd had a son who they called – what else. Some say he's bound to change his name to Jeafferson to keep the family going but for the moment it's a Pigott in the main Dullingham House, Elliott Smith told Pickwick.

The house itself is red brick with a doorway dominated by Corinthian columns. Once inclosure had been got out of the way the family had added another storey, enlarged the grounds and brought in Humphry Repton to landscape the park.

The other large house is at Lower Hare Park, on the heathland between the Cambridge and London roads. About 40 years ago a training groom put up the first buildings there on land he leased from the Jeaffreson estate. Then he sold it to Richard, the Earl Grosvenor, a great racing man.

Well his Lordship needed something to spend his money on – you remember the scandal when his wife was caught in flagrante delicto with the Duke of Cumberland, brother of King George III. Grosvenor brought that juicy court case during which their love-letters had been published – similar to what happened at Hinchingbrooke - and was awarded damages of £10,000. He couldn't divorce his wife since he too was guilty of adultery but they separated, him paying her a settlement of £1,200 each year. That's when he returned to his horse-racing and womanising, lodging at Dullingham when visiting his Newmarket stud.

After his death Robert, the second earl, enlarged the place into a handsome house where he lived during Newmarket meetings – when he wasn't developing his Pimlico estate with Belgrave Square, Wilton Place and all the rest and building up his art collection. He was created Marquess of Westminster at the Coronation of the late King, William IV and some say he's the richest subject in the Empire.

But it was the marital arrangements of a much less exulted Dullingham lady that had really got the gossips going. Mrs Sarah Sandfield was a widow woman who William Noble, a respectable tradesman from Brinkley. They were both of roughly equal age – and that was the point. They were both of them over seventy.

The ceremony had been unusual too: taking the part of the bride's father was the bride's son-in-law and her bride's maid was her great granddaughter. There were the usual 'young men and maidens, old men and children' – about 680 of them!

It was the talk of the King's Head, the only pub in the parish. It's owned by the Charity Trustees under the will of Stephen Leader back in the 1590s, but it was more like a cottage and in a very ruinous state. So a few years ago the church vestry meeting decided to have it rebuilt and extended. That was an expensive enterprise so the rent from the rest of the estate that Leader left has been used to pay the bills, apart from a bit spent on black cloth bought at Stourbridge Fair to clothe the poor at Christmas

There are other problems about the charities – rents that should have been taken from the White House on the north side of Stoney Street have not been received for many years. Nor are there any deeds – they were apparently been burnt some years ago. In fact the situation in this village is very similar to that elsewhere

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Whatever the goings on in Brinkley, they were nothing compared to the scandals that had spread about the daughter of the owner of Fordham Abbey, William Dunn Gardner.

The story involved the Most Hon George Ferrars Townshend, third Marquess Townshend of Rainham in the county of Norfolk. He'd been educated at Eton and Trinity College, Cambridge and succeeded to the peerage on the death of his father July 27 1811.

But before that, when he was known as Lord Chartley, he'd married Sarah, the daughter of William Dunn Gardner of Chatteris after a three-week courtship. William had been aware of the importance of making a good match for his girl: he himself had married an heiress and changed his own surname to ensure he'd inherit Chatteris House and her other estates. Now Sarah was about to enter the very highest society and would one day be Marchioness Townshend.

As far as the Honourable George was concerned the wedding not only brought him a bride, it promised something he was more urgently in need of: a dowry of £15,000 from the bride's father and a marriage settlement of £35,000 from his own. In fact it did not help at all, for his father refused to pay out and her father made sure the money was tied up: it was to the husband and wife jointly and then to their children. If there were no children it went back to Sarah to do with as she chose. As a result George's financial problems only got worse than they had been before.

Nor was it a marriage made in heaven. James Gulliver, one of the family servants, told people that within a week things had been very cold and indifferent between the unhappy couple. Some said he never had any feelings for her at all – it was the money he wanted, others that Lord Chartley was addicted to 'unnatural crimes' and unable to perform his marital duties.

Sarah went back home taking the furniture with her and instituted a suit in the Ecclesiastical Court to have the marriage annulled on the grounds of his impotency. A doctor was called to examine his Lordship who backed her claims, though George was adamant the marriage had been consummated. Things quickly got even worse: before the case came to court Lady C eloped with Mr John Margetts, a brewer from St Ives. They married at Gretna Green then went to live with her father in one of his London residences. Later the couple asked a friend to read the words of the marriage ceremony from the prayer book, repeating them after her, and Mr Margetts produced a ring.

Within a very short time Sarah was delivered of a son who she styled the Earl of Leicester – implying it was George's child, even though she'd claimed he was impotent! That baby died within a few months but was soon followed by several others, who were all given the surname of Margett. The couple lived openly as man and wife and were apparently very content. But

her parents were not happy about it; when she asked her father for funds he'd replied "You have brought disgrace upon me and my family and Margett must maintain you"

Meanwhile Lord Charley was suffering the most grievous pecuniary embarrassment. He spent much of the time abroad, living in privacy and concealment and was daily apprehensive of being arrested. He constantly shifted his residence from one place to another, living at private houses and public houses under assumed names, travelling always on Sundays and at hours when he expected to be able to escape the vigilance of the officers of the law. But even more he was anxious to have his abode concealed from his wife for she had already brought contempt and disgrace upon him

He instituted proceedings to annul his marriage but his financial problems prevented him from prosecuting them. He continued to be on bad terms with his father who refused to support him beyond an allowance of £600 a year until his death in 1811

Things changed in December 1823. For at a wholesale christening the children previously acknowledged as those of Sarah and John Margetts were baptised as the children of the Most Noble George Ferrars, Marquess Townshend and the Most Noble Sarah Dunn Gardner, Marchioness Townshend. They were now all Lords and Ladies and as there was a vacancy for an Earl of Leicester, the eldest lad started to use that title – even though he had been born 15 months after his mother had separated from his supposed father.

At this the Marquess wrote to William Dunn Gardner to discuss a deal advantageous to all parties: he would acknowledge the legitimacy of Lord Leicester in return for suitable funding. It was not taken up and now it seemed as if the bastard son of a St Ives brewer would in a few years become recognised as one of the principal peers of all England and owner of the principal family seat of Tamworth castle

Whilst Sarah, estranged wife of the Most Honourable third Maquess Townshend, was fighting for the rights of her children to inherit Tamworth Castle, her father, William Dunn Gardner had spent her marriage dowry on the purchase of Soham mere, formerly owned by the Townshend family.

It had been a good buy: land that had previously been worth £10 an acre was now fetching six times that amount and renting at an average of fourteen shillings an acre. But that was after it had been drained, and there was the problem. Drainage was expensive: costs varied with the different nature of the substrata, but an engine of 40 hp with its scoop wheel and requisite buildings generally cost about £4,000.

Back in 1830 a Mr Brown had offered to erect one of his patented gas vacuum engines to drain Soham Mere. The locals were sceptical but Brown produced a list of his partners who would speak to the success of the engine in propelling agricultural implements and carriages and testify that there was no doubt it would do the job. The engine was installed and worked for an hour and a half discharging about the same quantity of water as a 30 hp steam engine. But it used far more gas than anticipated and the retorts could not supply enough to keep it working. It was also incapable of creating a perfect vacuum and was generally a failure. The Commissioners took Brown and his companions to court when the alleged partners denied that they had anything to do with this particular application of the new technology

Now another pump had been installed, this time a more conventional steam engine. Normally it only needed a 10 hp steam engine running at intervals in four months out of the twelve to drain a district of 1,000 acres of land and keep the water down below the plants. This one was four times as powerful. The question was whether it would continue to stay dry.

History was not encouraging. Soham Mere had been originally a lake spreading across 1,600 acres between Wicken and Ely. It had always been a dangerous place: King Canute had crossed it to attend the festival of the Purification at Ely Cathedral, not by boat but on foot. But although a cold snap had turned the water to ice, the King who was aware of his failure to control the tides, had been worried about his safety. None of his soldiers or courtiers volunteered to be the first to test the strength of the frozen mere but among the crowd was Brithmar, a serf, whose nickname ‘Pudding’ was testimony to his stoutness.

‘Pudding’ was a native familiar with the mere and offered to go before and show the way. If the ice could bear a man so large and fat as him, it would not break under the weight of a small thin man like Canute. And so it proved: all got safely over the frozen mere with no mishaps other than a few slips and falls on the smooth ice. As a reward Brithmar was made a freeman and his little property was also made free.

There had been attempts to drain Soham mere in the 1740s, but they had failed following a storm which had weakened the newly-made banks – a event that Smith had learned at first hand from an elderly fellow auctioneer, John Helder. He’d described how the storm of wind and snow from the North had badly damaged the drainage mills whose sail cloths had been frozen and could not be rolled up.

Then in December, 1747, during another great flood, John had sent his son with other neighbours to fetch home the horses out of Waterbeach Fen. In crossing the Cam in a boat with three horses the fast-flowing stream had driven sheets of ice against the craft, throwing his son and two of the animals overboard. The boy was rescued just in time but had since died

– a bitter pill for Helder to swallow. He was not a lucky man: another son had died in infancy when his daughter was struck-down with the small pox. Happily the girl recovered but then his wife died. John had never remarried although when he was 57 years old gossips had told tales of how he was keeping company with a young woman. It was true, but being a deeply religious man, John could not be sure whether she was a true woman or not. Perhaps it had been God's judgement on his early transgressions.

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John Helder had been a well-known character out at Soham. As a lad he'd had enjoyed playing cards, dice, dancing, reading ungodly ballads and unchaste songs. He also stopped attending church thus offending all his relatives, particularly an uncle with an estate who threatened to cut him out of his will.

But John reformed himself: during a dangerous illness he saw a vision of a young woman, then he met and married her and turned away from his old life. However misfortune stalked him: he lost cattle in an outbreak of distemper, his debtors were always disappointing him in their payments, his neighbours who he befriended treated him the most scurvily whilst those to whom he had given no credit proved his best friends. Then he lost money when the Norfolk Mail coach was robbed.

He also suffered a series of misfortunes, as he recalled in his journal: "my head has been broken at six several times and places, yet not by the hand of man, but by falls and by cattle and other strange accidents. I have had three violent blows on the mouth, one of them by a ram and two by horses, by which some of my teeth were broken and others loosened, and my speech much hindered. I have very often had great deliverances from danger by wagons and carts, also by horses and other cattle, and by thieves and other enemies and by violent tempests"

Helder was an auctioneer who often made long journeys in connection with his business. One trip took him as far afield as Worcestershire after the Rector of Gazeley had received a letter inquiring whether there was any of the name of Helders living there or anywhere thereabouts. It came from a very old man, who had some money to dispose of to the family if any of them was living. So John had set off on horseback to visit his newly found relation who gave him ten guineas to defray his charges. When he died two years and a half years later he bequeathed him a good deal of his estate. But before John could get down claim his inheritance thieves struck: the trunk was broken open and all the money taken away. John's great expectations seemed to have been dashed until after a very careful search all over the trunk he found a secret place with near a hundred pieces of gold which the thief had not discovered.

On one of his journeys to London Helder heard a sermon which changed his life and made him aware of an actual Satan, tempting and lying in wait for his soul. He thus joined the ranks of other local men who became prominent for their religious beliefs.

One of these was Andrew Fuller whose parents farmed at Padney on the Wicken shore of Soham mere. When a lad of twenty he had been invited to become pastor of the Baptist church at Soham where he drew up a covenant and articles of faith to which the congregation had to subscribe. After Andrew moved away he was succeeded by John Gisburne who opposed the idea of signing a creed and urged the congregation to abandon the scheme. Then he went further and adopted Unitarian principles which split the congregation, many of whom stayed away.

It was at this time that Andrew Fuller returned to visit his family and was invited to preach in his old chapel once more. On his way there he was met by a mob who tried to frighten him and stop him taking the service but he rebuked them and warned of the consequences of disturbing public worship. That meeting passed off peacefully but it was not the end of religious dissent.

The Soham Unitarians flourished to the dismay of those who stayed away, so they decided to return in sufficient numbers to turf Gisburne out as minister. Time after time they tried to get a vote taken to eject him but were always in a minority. So they turned to more direct action. Sunday after Sunday they caused a tumult in the chapel, bringing in religious books which they read out aloud during the service. On one occasion the interruptions were so violent that Gisburne was compelled to call on the police for protection. But the officer refused to act without a warrant. This emboldened the opponents: after the morning service they managed to get the keys and lock the chapel doors.

When the congregation assembled that afternoon they found themselves barred from their own building. Not to be denied one of the trustees forced open a window and Gisburne scrambled in to open the door from the inside. At this the constable who had refused to act previously took him into custody. He was taken before two clerical magistrates who sent him to trial at the next Cambridge assizes.

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The prospect of Soham nonconformists arguing their doctrinal differences in court was not one that anybody relished. But things had gone too far to back down now: John Gisburne had been locked out of the chapel where he'd ministered and arrested after he'd got in through a window to open the door from the inside. It was a dispute that had to be sorted one way or the other

Before the trial wo local respected ministers offer to mediate. One was Andrew Fuller who'd built up the Soham congregation and disapproved of the changes Gilburne had introduced. The other was Robert Aspland.

The two men were very alike. Both had been born in Wicken, both knew personal tragedy: Robert had been the only child born in his family to survive while Andrew had the misfortune to lose all but two of his eleven children in infancy and endure the early death of his wife whose mind had become deranged with grief.

Now they tried to negotiate a settlement. If Gisburne would retire then the indictment would be withdrawn, but this would mean a surrender and something he would not agree. So the matter went to court and after lengthy doctrinal discussions the jury through out the case. This left the Soham nonconformists still split, still concerned that a chapel that had been paid for by one branch of the Baptist faith had been appropriated by another. So it was decided to seek the advice of two referees from among the Cambridge Dissenters.

The referees agreed that Gisburne was in the right but decided that the chapel should be handed back to the minority congregation anyway. They awarded him sum of money in compensation which he used as the first contribution to a fund for raising a Unitarian chapel in Soham. With the backing of Aspland this was quickly erected and opened in April 1810.

However the matter was not finished. Andrew Fuller then demanded that his own costs should come out of the money awarded to Gisburne. The argument flared up again with pamphlets and letters being published by either side with words such as 'bigotry' and 'intolerance' banded about and debates over 'Calvinism' 'Antitrinitarians' and 'Socinian' interpretations

that soared far over the head of ordinary mortals. But all were agreed that this time Fuller had gone too far

One man who knew both antagonists was John Emons, the Wicken blacksmith. He had been converted and baptised by Andrew Fuller and had been one of those who'd disrupted Gisburne's service in Soham chapel when he'd sought to substitute one of Fuller's publications for the Holy Bible. It had been this preposterous suggestion that was largely responsible for the case being dismissed. Later John had seen the error of his ways and adopted a milder theology only to find himself condemned by his former pastor who never forgave his backsliding.

Robert Aspland had known Emons all his life and as a lad was often to be seen at the forge questioning him over searching theological issues. But it was not just religion that was discussed at the blacksmiths, for it was the place were folk gathered while he read them the news of the day from newspapers already several days old. Robert had probably read it already for it was one of his tasks to collect the paper on his way home from Soham Grammar School.

There he had been taught by his uncle, John Aspland – though whether he'd learned very much was doubtful. For the master was a self-educated man of rough manners and eccentric habits. He was certainly skilled in mathematics and music, teaching the harpsichord as an addition to the normal curriculum. Sadly he was less skilled in language or general knowledge, nor did he know how to teach. He was merciless in the use of a whip, the handle of which served as a poker. He was also miserly. When his housekeeper appealed for cleaning materials, saying that visitors would blame her for not keeping the house in proper order he penned an apology in verse that he instructed her to hang up prominently

It read

Be it known to all those
Who perhaps may suppose
That this house is not kept very clean,
Neither mop, brush nor plow
Will its master allow –
Such a niggard scarce ever was seen

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John Aspland had served as teacher at the Soham free school for some 50 years before he was finally persuaded to stand down in favour of a younger and more efficient educator. The school had been established in 1699 and was open to parish boys so long as they could read the New Testament. Not that many attended: in summer months the numbers dropped down to 20, though the schoolroom filled up to capacity when winter winds blew – with youngsters taking advantage of the one shilling annual charge for firing that their parents had to pay.

Most of them were sons of farmers and tradesmen rather than lads of poor families: they needed their children to work on the land rather than be bothered with writing and arithmetic, skills they would never need. Others maintained that the reason numbers were so low was due to the poor standard of teaching: Aspland was often called away leaving the instruction to his son.

But the work for which he earned his wage was not just concerned with education. He had to administer the parish workhouse and ensure supplies of wool for the poor to spin and so earn

money for the charity which funded the school. This became more difficult as the new massive factories were constructed in the north – part of the 'Industrial Revolution' that was transforming the country - and his successor, William Warren had finally had to concede that this particular industry was no longer viable in the fens.

But while Aspland could control behaviour within the classroom he was powerless to stop their apparently respectable fathers from taking the law into their own hands. There'd been a spate of thefts in Soham and in the surrounding villages stretching over a period of two years, between 1819 and 1821. Fowls and grain had been pinched from farms in Snailwell, Exning, Wicken, Freckenham, Fordham and Worlington, sheep and pigs had also had been stolen and houses burgled.

Then police had arrested twenty-two prominent townsmen and flung them into gaol to await trial. They were not ruffians from the fen, but men from respectable families including Thomas Isaccson and his sons George and Edward, Henry and John Attlesey, James Bailey, William Webb and John Thurston. Only two had been in trouble before and many had their own houses, gardens and cattle. Yet the judge had cracked down: William Day was sentenced to death for burglary, though the sentence was commuted to transportation along with thirteen others. More were imprisoned with hard labour which all felt to be harsh punishments. The only evidence was that given by an accomplice who had been persuaded to testify against them.

Their friends were sure that somebody had informed against them and that man was William Horsley. One night they decided to take revenge, as he'd told Elliott Smith. "I was sleeping peacefully in my bed when the door burst open and four men pulled me out, dragged me across the yard and threw me in a ditch. After that they took me home but then decided I'd not been punished enough so they hauled me into town with nothing on but my shirt. One man kept slapping my legs with a carpenters rule and another kept taking up my shirt to expose my person to the mob."
They'd dragged him to the Crown Inn where he was plonked on the back of an ass facing the tail. Then he was given a second ducking, this time in a pond, and further paraded through the streets back to the Red Lion. He reckoned that it was only the intervention of Mr Merrest, Mr. Orman the clergy man and Mr. Addison the surgeon, that saved him from being drowned: Addison told the mob that that a third immersion, this time in the river, might prove fatal. After that Horsley was taken home and after some shouting and jeering, the crowd broke up about 10 o' clock. But if Horsley had been the informer then Smith considered he'd got off very lightly!

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It wasn't just suspected informers that were being given a rough time. Primitive Methodist missionaries were also being subjected to violence as they struggled to establish a following in the local area.

In some places the congregations built up and the preaching places were far too small to contain them. At Brandon numbers had risen rapidly until in 1835 there had been over 400 believers and they had managed to erect a chapel of their own in which to hold their services, despite determined attempts by certain men of influence to crush the movement.

At Tottenhill in Norfolk a prominent land owner said that sooner than have Methodism preached in any of his cottages he would raze them to the ground, and threatened to turn all the followers out of their houses and employment. It left the congregation with no place in which to meet for religious worship except the open air. However they remained firm to the

cause and whenever the weather would permit they assembled for worship in the lanes and sought for shelter under hedge rows

At Newmarket, well known as a place of horse racing and other carnal sports, the Methodists feared the inhabitants were deeply sunk in depravity and vice. So to this scene of iniquity they sent one of its missionaries. He met with considerable opposition and his life was threatened but he realized some success. Soon eighty six people were attending meetings. But then things went badly wrong. One of the preachers was found to be less than free from sin himself and gave up Methodism to be ordained as a clergyman in the Established Church.

By the time John Bunn was appointed in July 1837 he found support distressingly low with only about thirty folk in the congregation and just three preaching places at Newmarket, Saxon Street and Snailwell. The state of things greatly distressed him but he'd laboured hard to promote the cause and endured much opposition and persecution in his attempt to bring souls to Christ. He visited several places and met with a degree of success at some of them. But at others influential persons repeated the threats to anyone who should give him any encouragement.

At Cheveley the clergyman was a magistrate and a farmer who had the villagers mainly under his authority. Residents were required to sign a paper promising not to let Mr Bunn or any of his associates come near their houses and if they refused to sign it or afterwards broke their engagement they were deprived of their employment. One man was turned out of his house with his wife and eight children and had his furniture thrown into the street for attempting to open his dwelling for preaching.

But the most violent opposition and persecution which Mr Bunn experienced was at Mildenhall. There he started preaching in the market place with good effect and even obtained a house in which to hold services when the weather would not permit open air worship. A considerable number of persons attended the meetings and several appeared to obtain much spiritual benefit. But as the work of God progressed so persecution followed; ragged gangs of godless persons not only interrupted the meetings but also abused the missionary and his flock as they went through the streets.

At length Bunn was arraigned before a bench of magistrates charged with obstructing the highway and committed to Bury jail for ten days. This injustice even astonished the prisoners at the jail. One of them said to Mr Bunn, 'Sir they sent you here for trying to do good, and me for doing harm'.

Bunn endured his incarceration and its attendant privations and sufferings with Christian fortitude but was happy to obtain his release at the appointed time and in the evening of the same day arrived at Mildenhall where he stood up in the market place again and preached to several hundred attentive hearers.

After a year's labour, frequently amidst showers of stones and rotten eggs, sometimes with no food and without a bed to lie upon, he had built up a following of fifty five together with four local preachers. Now they were planning the erection of a new chapel; soon a new building would soon be opening at Beck Row, just a mile and a half away from the residence of the magistrate who'd been chiefly instrumental in sending him to prison

One man attracted to the Methodist cause at Beck Row was Richard Rolph, who told his tale in a pamphlet preserved amongst Pickwick's papers.

I was born in the little village of Lakenheath in March 1801 to poor parents and went to a charity school for a short while before being taken away to earn a living as a bricklayer, though I continued attending a Methodist Sunday School. When I was 20 I was working on scaffolding at Mildenhall when dense clouds began to gather around me and everything went dark. It was not the weather that had changed, it was my eyesight that faded away. A medical gentleman, pitying my condition, arranged for me to be taken to St Thomas' Hospital in London. There was no improvement so I took myself to the Eye Infirmary in Chaterhouse Square where my eyes were examined. But my disorder baffled all their experts, so I decided to return home to Lakenheath.

There my friends rallied round, subscribed together and bought me a violin! I practised from five in the morning until ten at night – which annoyed my neighbours – but by the end of the first week I could partly play three tunes. When I was able to play a few more I was asked to play at a country dance where my performance pleased so well that I soon gained a considerable celebrity for my musical abilities. I took up the trade of an itinerant minstrel playing at fairs, feasts, balls, plays, weddings, hawkeys and cockfights, my brother going with me to lead me and to accompany me on the tambourine. But continually in bad company I became a confirmed drunkard and a loose profane talker, scarcely did I retire to rest sober. I became a Sabbath breaker selling shrimps, oysters and other shell fish on that sacred day.

But then my religious upbringing started to make itself felt. I wanted to break off my sinful practices but if I did I should bring my wife and family to want, as I had no other means of supporting them. Besides I had promised to be at several places of amusement which I had been accustomed to attend. To these I went with a strong resolution to resist the temptations to which I should be exposed and endeavouring to avoid intoxicating liquors. Often when playing I walked out and wept before returning to my place again. Sometimes I broke my violin strings wilfully in hopes I should put an end to the revelry but I was immediately supplied with new ones. I then tried leaving the company in the midst of their dancing and concealing myself from them but I was soon sought out and induced to return.

I was urged to drink and told I had till lately been good company but while the young and giddy were enjoying their false pleasure I was suffering the lashings of a guilty conscience. As soon as an opportunity presented itself I attended the house of God and as I was returning home I heard some of the people say 'the fiddler has been at the chapel' as if my attendance had in it something marvellous.

But my former companions learned that I should soon become a Methodist and did all they could to prevent me attending. Being near Christmas they tried to get me to return to my music, afraid they should loose their fiddler as they had no other in the village. The parties who assembled at the Bell Inn, Lakenheath, sent for me but I refused to attend. They went away in a rage abusing me and saying had they known how they would have been served by me they would not have assisted in purchasing my violin.

On one occasion a young man who had shown me much kindness came to me and hoped for once I would be a friend to him. He said he had laid a wager that I would not draw my bow across my violin at the public house door and if I would go and decide it he would give me ten shillings. After much persuading I consented to go. But while at the door my violin was taken from me I was carried into the house and locked in. Some held my hands behind me while others placed the violin at my shoulder drew the bow across the strings shouting "we have broke the old fiddler in again". At last to put an end to all these stratagems I sold my violin.

On February the 6th 1834 I was conducted to a Social meeting held at Mr Papworth's at Weeting near Brandon. There I was able for the first time publicly to speak of the goodness of God. Many wept and I was urged to have it written out that it might be the means of doing good to others. Till then I had no idea of publishing and I even thought it impossible, being stone blind and illiterate. But I got my little boy about 10 years old to write down my thoughts: The life of Richard Rolph, the blind peasant of Lakenheath, composed by himself

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Blindness was a disability that afflicted men of every religious belief. Elliott Smith had discovered a number of them in an area around Crowland while preparing for the biggest property sales ever publicly auctioned in June 1829.

The Crowland Abbey Estate comprised more than 6,300 acres and 43 farms together with the Manor and Manor House, including the whole town of Crowland with its 132 houses. It was supposed to pass to the male issue of Thomas Orby Hunter whose family consisted only of two daughters and now that his wife had reached the advanced age of 57 years it seemed very unlikely there would be a legitimate inheritor. That was the risk the new buyer took. Bidding had started at 250,000 guineas and it was finally knocked down to Sir John Dean Paul for a remarkable 332,000 guineas

Crowland was a wonderful place, well worth a visit, as Smith related: Travelling from Spalding to Peterborough you spot a tower and a giant arch, visible for miles across the fens, though travellers will not have many years to view, it being almost entirely demolished. Part of one side has been long converted into the parish church, which was locked up when I was there, so I walked about the churchyard and had a talk with the Sexton, who was very merry, digging a grave. He was a pleasant, intelligent, facetious fellow and I could not help being highly entertained with his humour and drollery. He could point out the exact spot of any grave and directed me to his cottage where his wife was who has the key of the church.

I congratulated her on having so cheerful a husband. She said he was a very good man, and a good scholar; he'd formerly been an assistant schoolmaster, as well as sexton. He was the easiest person in the world to live with, except for the year of his misfortune. What misfortune – loss of sight! 'Well be thankful he his recovered and got well again', I sympathised. 'Yes sir, he is well to be sure, but never got the better of his blindness, nor has he been able to see for 18 years past', she told me.

This could not have been the man I'd see digging the grave, for I'd been gossiping with him for some time and he'd been shovelling earth and talking without the slightest hint of any disability. But no, it was indeed him. He'd lost his sight after a cold he caught one severe winter when he was obliged to travel about in the snow to many places to try and find somebody to officiate in place of Mr James Benson, the vicar.

What was more remarkable was that the vicar was also blind. I fancy he was born blind or at least had always a very imperfect vision. He'd been educated at Wadham College and was a good scholar, a man of excellent sense, modest, very agreeable and entertaining in company and a man of irreproachable morals and conduct.

He went through all the Church Service and even the First Lessons without the least hesitation. He had a little lad to help him and to whom he would dictate his sermons. He'd even taught the boy to read Greek so that when he needed to refer to a particular passage in the Greek Testament he would get the lad to read it through to him. The boy had not the faintest idea what he was reading, but the Reverend did. The problem was that his income was very small and he had difficulty keeping a good servant as he could not afford the wages.

As soon as the lad could read he left to find more remunerative employment and he had to start all over again. Nevertheless he also supported his predecessor's widow and daughter

He had a fine grey mare which had carried him safely many years and which he'd been offered twenty guineas for but, he told me, 'a kingdom would hardly pay me the value of her'. One day she was turned out to grass with other horses that chased after her and she fell and broke her leg which made it necessary to dispatch her. He was given another horse but it was nothing like his old favourite and a short time after it flung him; he died almost immediately.

But if a blind sexton and a blind vicar were not remarkable enough, there was something more remarkable still at Holbech: a blind watchmaker!

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Blindness is a terrible affliction though some remarkable people managed to mock its attempts to curtail their lives. One such was a Holbech clockmaker by the name of Rippin. He was the eldest son of a very clever man who made superior clock chimes which played six or eight tunes. He was brought up in the business by his father but then suffered a severe cold which affected his eyes and blindness set in.

However he continued cleaning and repairing watches, clocks, musical instruments and other mechanical contrivances, assisted by his wife for the most intricate operations. He usually had a hundred watches in for repair at any time, many of them sent from great distances. He knew every watch by the touch and every customer by his voice. On one occasion he was robbed when the thief stole watch-wheels, hair-springs and other tiny items belonging to the trade. The man was convicted after Rippin gave evidence at the trial, having sworn to his property by feeling.

He was not a man to cross: once going from Spalding to Donnington he was stopped near Mr Hick's Mill at Surfleet by two men wearing smock frocks who demanded his money and on his refusing, immediately knocked him down. One of the ruffians kneeled upon him and started to rifle through his pockets when Rippin drew a clasp knife from his pocket and stabbed the villain in the back. Smarting from his wound the robber loosed his hold and both of them absconded. Rippin called up a labourer with whose help he found his knife again and continued on his journey. But when he got near Gosberton Belney the same two fellows attacked him again, this time with a cudgel. Again Rippin drew his knife and inflicted such serious injuries that they were obliged to crawl away without their booty. The villains got away but must have been severely wounded as Rippin's knife and stick were clotted with gore

The Rippins generally were not a family to squabble with, sighted or not. Out at Grantham George Rippin, a draper, fought a duel with John Barston a silversmith in a field at the back of the Blue Lion. The ground was measured, 12 paces, and the pistols loaded. Then each man with trembling hand and shaking knees took up their weapons and exchanged shots. As neither was hit they prepared to go again but the seconds intervened to stop a second attempt. Matters having been amicably arranged the two men repaired to the Blue Bell to cheer their spirits with some mulled wine. But nobody could work out how they'd both missed – not until their seconds announced that the pistols had been only loaded with powder, not ball. What made it more remarkable was that Rippin was a chief constable and Barston the churchwarden.

There are two clocks up in Lincolnshire that are unique, according to Elliott Smith. One is the single-handed clock face on Tattershall church, probably the largest in the world. The face is painted directly onto the wall of the tower and was probably installed in the 17th century. It is sixteen-and-a-half feet in diameter and the hand is nearly 9 feet long. The driving weights are

large stones and the pendulum is so long that it swings only once every two seconds. The pendulum is not actually attached to the clock but is some distance away, linked by a long connecting rod. There are only three wheels in the timekeeping mechanism but it keeps excellent time and needs winding once a day.

Another stands in the Old Inn at Fosdyke. It shows the phases of the moon by a globe painted half white and half black, while the moon's age and the day of the month are shown by separate hands and dials. But the really special thing about it is that it has a separate dial that shows the rising and falling of the tides at Fosdyke Wash and points when it is safe for the drovers and their cattle to start to cross – a distance of two miles though the bare sands and shifting channels of the estuary.

There are two clocks at Peterborough, one on the cathedral and the other on St John's church, but they don't often agree. Locals have a little rhyme:

When the church of the Abbey is three minutes fact
There will be a gay wedding before the month's past.
When the clock of the abbeyis three minutes slow
The river's bright waters will soon overflow.
When the Church clock and Abbey clock both strike together
There will soon be a death, or a change in the weather

But if you want to hear a cacophony of church bells striking the time, well Cambridge is the place.

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Despite the increasing number of church clocks many people preferred on having their own way of telling the time. The problem was that they could not afford it. So pocket watches were becoming one of the most attractive of items for thieves.

The villains were a mixed bunch. Within recent months a lad of only 12 years of age had been convicted for stealing a watch together with money, some bread and meat and a tobacco-box from James Touch's house at March. The judge blamed the father who'd never taken the boy to church and had turned him out of doors because he would not go begging on St Thomas' day. Although he passed a sentence of seven years transportation he'd prefer the boy to be placed in an asylum where he would be taught religious morals and brought up in a right and correct manner.

Some stole purposely to go to gaol: when James Yarrow, 30, pleaded guilty when indicted for breaking and entering the shop of William Laws of Prickwillow and stealing a watch and some shoes. He had been a soldier in the first regiment of foot guards and served in Portugal, but had deserted. He did not care what became of him so when the judge sentenced him to 14 years transportation he exclaimed "Hurra! Thank you, my Lord!"

Not all were happy to pay the penalty. In March 1838 as the prisoners in Ely Bridewell were returning from chapel, Daniel Archer who'd been charged with stealing watches from the shop of Mr. Jeremiah Giscard, took his opportunity to escape. While passing through the hall

of the Governor's house with the other prisoners he'd sneaked into the coal-cellar. It was two hours before the turnkey noticed that he was missing, by which time he was well away.

But the crime that was still being talked about had taken place at Ely in 1833 when Elizabeth Seymour and John Britain were accused of burgling the house of Mr William Lavender and stealing sovereigns, gold, copper, and three silver watches. Lavender was a large farmer, aged over 80, and Elizabeth had been his confidential servant for over 20 years. He was now very old and feeble and she'd nursed him, frequently getting up in the middle of the night to give him a glass of rum and milk and sooth him to sleep. She knew all his most secret money concerns and he trusted her implicitly, even making her a present of a hundred pounds and agreeing she should marry his nephew.

But one morning the horsekeeper noticed that the shutters on one of the parlour windows had been taken off its hinges and a pane of glass removed. The inside doors were still locked but a large bureau was missing. It was found in the bushes, ransacked of its valuables including 215 sovereigns, several guineas, £100 in silver and three watches.

Suspicion fell on Elizabeth and a young man who had been paying her court. She was thrown into gaol to await trial and spent many months locked away from her family until she was finally released on bail. When the case finally came to trial various inconsistencies became apparent. Elizabeth had all the keys to the house, if she were involved in the burglary why was the bureau not just carried out of the front door? And there was one thing even more remarkable: although over £400 had been stolen the bureau's secret drawer had not be disturbed and inside that was another £900 in notes. The only people who knew of its existence were William Lavender and Elizabeth Seymour.

Various folk came forward to attest to her honesty, she was a good conscientious woman who had never done wrong and the jury, after deliberating for a good five minutes, had no doubt of her innocence. William Lavender lived for another two years, finally dying in 1835 at the grand old age of 85 but those last months were lonely without her company. Lavender himself had never thought she was guilty, but various other members of the family had poisoned his mind against her, jealous of the influence she was having over him.

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No sooner had the gossip died down about the activities of one Ely woman than it started up about others. The story spread about how Mary Vale had gone to Cambridge to seek work when she met Matthew Feakes, who lived just around the corner from their mother. He was a waggoner on the road between Ely and London and promised to get a situation as nursery-maid for both Mary and her sister, Elizabeth. So the girls placed their boxes on his wagon, said goodbye to their family and set off.

On arrival at the Catherine Wheel at about half-past-four in the morning they'd been introduced to Mrs Jones, an unpleasant-looking lady who said she would be like a mother to them. She called a cab and took them to her house in Lombard Court, off Fleet Street, where the sisters, exhausted by their journey, slept soundly.

Next morning Mrs Jones took them on a tour of the area, walking them up and down Fleet Street for half-an-hour. Then she introduced Mary to a gentleman in her dining room, where there was a bed. She was plied with negus, a mixture of port wine and lemon juice often made for children's parties. But this seemed somewhat stronger than usual and under its influence Mary became acquainted with something else which she claimed she found far less pleasant. Afterwards the 'gentleman' gave her a present of ten shillings, which Mrs Jones demanded from her.

Shocked by such treatment Mary decided to leave. She packed her clothes into a bundle and told Mrs Jones she was going to take them to wash. But the woman replied, "Though you are a country girl, I am as deep as you are" and demanded seventeen shillings which she claimed was due to her for lodgings. So Mary stayed on, handing over the money she received from the numerous other 'gentlemen' she met. In return Mrs Jones gave her gifts of a painted muslin dress, a second-hand parasol, a pair of green gloves and some shoes.

By now their mother in Ely was becoming concerned; she travelled down to London where she found her daughters sharing a bed. They seemed reluctant to leave but she took them away. Since then Mary had been very ill – not in the family way she claimed - though Elizabeth was not so sure about her own condition.

The sisters had to relive their experiences when the case came to trial. Various other Cambridge girls of easy virtue gave evidence that the girls had been very well aware of what they'd been letting themselves in for and had boasted how they'd been "going to live with an old bawd and have 'slap-up' silk dresses". Whatever the right and wrongs of their story there was no doubt that Mrs Jones had been keeping a brothel. However Feakes was acquitted of any crime and is still to be found plying his trade down the road to London carrying other ladies seeking their fortune.

But there was also scandal nearer home. A short time ago an elderly female, possessed of great feminine attractions, (notwithstanding she had weathered full fifty winters), opened a public house in Ely under the sign of "Victoria" with the likeness of the youthful Sovereign, invested in her regal robes. Many were the comments passed upon the beauty of our young Queen by the numerous visitors, nor were the fascinating charms of the fair landlady less frequently extolled. She was often heard to declare that her own beauty excelled even that of Victoria herself

Amongst the variety of her guests was a gallant young livery servant who found it impossible to resist her charms. Indeed so wonderful an impression did her enchanting smiles make upon his heart that after a courtship of one long day, he resolved to take her "for better or for worse". Accordingly a license was purchased and on the following morning the parties repaired to Church. But things did not go smoothly for it appeared that the fair bride was not a spinster, for she had before been escorted to the altar, and her husband was still in the land of the living. This announcement quite astounded the gallant lover who was obliged to return to his home, sorrowful and dejected at the defeat which his ardent affections had sustained. But what contributed to add still more to his mortification, was the loss of the money expended for the carrying of his projects into execution.

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Altough one young man from Ely had been preserved from a bigamous marriage whilst standing at the altar another young fellow had such a union upheld. However he had a good excuse.

Samuel Jordan, was able to convince the court that his first wedding had taken place at Abbotts' Ripton after he'd contrived to get a local girl in the family way. The couple had been forced into marriage by the Overseers of the Poor who were anxious not to have to support the forthcoming child. But at the time Samuel had been only 17 years old and the officials had not obtained the consent of either his father or mother. Consequently the marriage was not legal, so he could not be proved guilty of bigamy. He was accordingly acquitted.

Another couple made news when they became the first in Cambridge to marry without any religious ceremony at all. Robert Loveday Taylor and Susannah Scott had found quite a crowd waiting when they arrived for their wedding in August 1838, despite the earliness of the hour. For this was to be the first marriage at the Registrar's office in Peas Hill so people were keen to learn what it entailed and to view the couple who were repudiating the sanction of religion on entering the appointed state of wedlock

When the bride and groom made their appearance – though it might be sacrilegious to use such terms in this instance - the Registrar reminded them that though the law would recognise the civil contract as a legal marriage, they ought to regard it as a ceremony performed in the sight of God and not to consider it less binding on their consciences.

He then read the words: "I Robert Loveday Taylor do hereby declare that I know of no cause or impediment why I should not take thee, Susannah Scott, to be my wife, to be joined with me in holy Matrimony". The woman made a similar declaration. Robert then declared that he took her to be his wedded wife; the ring was tendered as a pledge of affection and fidelity and accepted as such. The persons there present were called on to witness the contact, the register was signed and it was over in about five minutes

But how could a virtuous woman bring herself to undertake such a ceremony of so little delicacy – perhaps even decency - people asked. Many were grieved at two people going out of their way to avoid the sanctity of a religious ceremonial and putting themselves to a little inconvenience. What was worse they seemed determined to let the world know that they regarded Matrimony with less solemnity than the very heathen who worships stones. It was disgusting what little the law regarded in the way of pledged truth and faith, of love and protection, on the one hand and respect and obedience on the other. But at least the way it was conducted and the reaction of those who witnessed it meant it was not calculated to encourage more people to follow their example.

It was more surprising that some people could not even remember where they'd been wed.

Take the case of Mary Ann Edwards a girl aged about 18 of very interesting appearance and manners. She appeared in a Cambridge court in November 1837 charged with assaulting a 70-year old lady named Mrs Todd. The woman gave evidence of how husband had left their marital home in William Street, Newington-Causeway, London and set up residence with the young Miss Edwards at the White Hart pub in James Street, Cambridge. The elderly woman had determined to seek out her beloved spouse and had journeyed to Cambridge where she was introduced to her rival who immediately flew at her and scratched her face. Mary Ann claimed that she was lawfully married to Mr Todd. She could not however remember the name of the church or anything about the ceremony but 'she was sure he was her husband and she would keep him – that she would'. The assault being proved Mary Ann was fined 3/- with 7/- costs, which she paid. Only after Mrs Todd senior returned to London did it transpire that she kept an 'establishment for young ladies' and was perhaps not the innocent old lady she purported to be!

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Now other coffee drinkers in the Little Rose started to join in with their stories of female iniquity.

One told how he'd responded to an advertisement in the Cambridge Chronicle in which a lady had appealed for a gentleman of her own rank to come forward to rescue her from the unhappiness of an ill-assorted marriage. Although she claimed to have no great personal beauty she did indicate that both her face and her form had been generally considered not

unpleasing. But the thing that had particularly caught his eye was that she would shortly become the uncontrolled mistress of seven to eight hundred pounds a year. So she invited a gentleman – and no gentleman would seek to take advantage of her situation – to address a letter to E.A. St O. at the Cambridge Chronicle office who would pass it on. Well he'd written but had received no reply.

Perhaps it was just for the best.

Women could easily drive a man to drink – that's what happened to Peter Dunwell. He and Elizabeth had been married for some time; they got on well, seldom quarrelled and had two children, one of them a very noisy child. One night his wife asked him to fetch half-a-pint of beer for her supper but when she drank it she said it tasted bad. She went off to the pub where she confronted the landlord, Minott, who showed her the pot it was drawn in and said nobody else had complained about it.

The she moaned to the neighbour, Mr Turner, who took things into his own hands. He stormed into the house, grabbed hold of Peter's collar and demanded to know what he'd put in the beer. Meanwhile Elizabeth started searching the cupboards and found an empty phial. She took it to Mrs Seawell's shop who said her husband had come in and bought a pennyworth of laudanum – about two drams. When Mr Winterborn, the surgeon, examined the beer he found it contained poison and had no doubt it was laudanum. By then she'd been to Mr Titterton, the superintendent of the police but by the time he came round to the house the husband had run off. He was finally arrested near Bury St Edmunds and locked up in gaol, charged with attempted poisoning.

Well Peter claimed he'd been a good deal troubled with the tooth-ache and had bought the laudanum to take the pain away. He'd poured some into the pot so he could dip his rag in it to apply to his tooth; he'd just forgotten to clean it out again. Well the jury believed him – he got off and they're back together again!

But not all such quarrels end happily. At Chippenham, near Newmarket, Francis Scrivener had only been doing what a man was entitled to do: he'd got very drunk and had started beating his wife in their bedroom. The thing was that it disturbed the man living next door, and that was his father-in-law. So him, his wife and their son had come to their daughter's assistance and after some argument she'd gone back with them to her father's home.

Well Francis wanted her back, so he armed himself with a pair of tongs and tried to get into the house. He was beating the son when the old man came out with a long house-broom and struck him a violent blow upon the head, which proved fatal. The jury decided it was 'excusable homicide' as he'd been trying to protect his daughter

And love can drive a man to distraction. Clement Portmore, a farmer's labourer, had gone down to London to see the new Queen, Victoria. Whilst there he passed the time throwing stones at the gas lamps in front of the grand archway of Buckingham Palace until a policeman came up and demanded what he was doing, Clement replied that he was only waiting until it was time for him to enter the Palace for his interview with Her Majesty.

He explained how they'd married secretly eleven years ago with the understanding that their wedding would be made public about now. In the meantime he'd made Victoria an allowance of £100,000 a year but now that farming was in a bad way he wanted some of it back. Her Majesty would not deny the truth of his claim, they'd spoken about it frequently. He'd been a farmer's servant, it was now time for him to be King. The policeman didn't believe him and he was being detained at Her Majesty's pleasure whilst they tried to sort out the basis of his claim. They were being hampered in their search for his home: Clement claimed it was Maining in Cambridgeshire but they were having difficulty tracking that down

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Some women achieved fame by their looks, others by their deeds and Charity Izzard was one of the latter. The recent death of this old lady at St Neots had prompted people to retell the tales of thirty years earlier.

It happened in Great Paxton, a small mean village chiefly consisting of scattered mud-walled and thatched cottages. One of them stands alone surrounded by ponds, reeds and bulrushes – for all the world just like the residence of a witch and her family.

In the afternoon of Wednesday the seventeenth of February 1808 Alice Brown had decided to go skating on the frozen river near her home. She'd only got a little way when the ice broke and she fell through into the freezing water. She got herself out and reached the bank where her friend Fanny Amey, stood anxiously waiting for her. Then shivering and frightened, Alice hastened to her father's house about a quarter of a mile away. Almost as soon as she entered she was seized with a strong epileptic fit. Her friend Fanny had herself been subject to epilepsy for several months and fell into similar convulsions. Alice found it hard to recover, her fits returned at short intervals and disqualified her for every kind of work, indeed she was so much reduced by them that her friends began to despair of her recovery.

When the Vicar, Isaac Nicholson, enquired after the state of her health he was astonished to hear that her weakness and dejection were due to witchcraft. Now Isaac had heard of a cure which involved filling a bottle with urine, adding pins and boiling it in an oven. Within minutes the afflicted person would see a variety of forms flitting before their eyes and amongst them the image of the person who had placed the spell. Alice tried it out, but nothing happened.

Then the following Sunday as Isaac made his way to church he was met by Charity Izzard, a poor little old woman, who in tears and greatly agitated, told him she was being accused of being a witch and of causing Alice's illness. She told how her neighbours threatened to punish her, abused her children and frightened her so much that she frequently dropped on the ground in fainting fits. Charity bought with her a large pair of scales borrowed from the maltster and the family bible with its massive brass clasps; she threw herself on her knees and begged the Vicar to allow her to get into the scales and prove her innocence by being weighed against the Holy Bible.

The Reverend Nicholson was convinced she had no involvement in witchcraft and said so from the pulpit, but nobody would listen to him. Almost the whole of the village turned against every member of the Izzard family apart from the son. He was a good-looking youth of seventeen who acted as a waggoner and would give a ride to any village women he met along his way to and from St Neots.

One Saturday evening he was going back to his master's farmyard with ten or twelve sacks of flour on the fore part of the wagon and about a dozen women, old and young, who he'd taken up on the road. Amongst them was his mother, Charity. This freight of gossips were returning to the village with their marketings, some with grocery, others with baskets of eggs, butter and other miscellaneous articles. When old grandma Izzard warned them to be careful of their merchandise or they might lose them perchance, the gossips sneered at her interference and jeered her for being a witch.

Just then the road started the sharp descent down into the village and the horses, which were high spirited animals, broke into a trot which increased into a gallop until the wagon suddenly flipped over and vomited forth the sacks of flour, the dozen old and young gossips, egg baskets, butter baskets, grocery and all the cargo. The passengers scrambled up, some sorely

torn and bruised, and leaving their merchandise in the road, ran open-mouthed into the village shrieking “The witch has turned over the wagon and we will have our revenge”.

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The folk at Great Paxton were convinced that Charity Izzard was a witch: she flew over the fields a broom-stick at midnight – though nobody actually saw her as she had the power of making herself invisible.

She’d put a spell on Mrs Papworth the wife of the publican of the Bell Inn, which was also the village shop, making her dance on the tea table among the cups and saucers. To break the spell Mrs Papworth had scratched Charity with a pin, drawing blood. But that was assault and the case had gone to court where the shopkeeper was sentenced to a month in prison, taking her four-week-old baby with her.

Charity Izzard had also bewitched a farmer’s wife who refused to supply her with butter unless she paid for it – she was always very bad at paying for anything. She always knew when the vicar, Isaac Nicholson, was going to have a bird for dinner and would be waiting on the doorstep early on the morning to beg for the gizzards. People were sure she fed her demons with them. If the cook refused then Charity would put a spell on the goose so that it would not cook – and it never did

So on Saturday evening Joseph Harper, Thomas Braybrook, James Staughton, Mary and Frances Amey and Alice Brown, together with fifty other villagers, made their way to the home Charity shared with her husband, Wright Izzard – “Wright Izzard is a wizard” the children always chanted.

Finding the door shut and bolted they forced it open. They dragged Charity from her bed, lacerated her arms, neck, breasts and sides with pins and other sharp instruments and beat her face, stomach and breast with a thick stick. Then to round things off they dashed her head against the large stones of the causeway till she lay battered and bleeding.

Charity crawled back into her house, put her clothes on and went to the constable. He said he could not protect her. But old Alice Russell did: she wrapped up the bleeding arms with the nicest linen rags she had before giving her a bed. For this act of charity Alice was attacked by other villagers who accused her of being as bad as the witch she had saved. Their hostility preyed on the elderly lady’s mind, alarmed at the thought of being called a witch she was taken ill and died ten days later.

After the attack peace reigned all the Sunday, but on Monday night Charity was a second time dragged out of her house and once more her arms were torn with pins till they streamed blood. Even that was not enough for the mob who decided they would duck her in the river next evening. But on hearing this Charity hastily left her cottage and took refuge in the vicarage where she stayed for some time where she planned her revenge.

She took her attackers to court and nine were found guilty. Even then the villagers did not accept that their behaviour was wrong. There had been too much tragedy in one small community: Mary Hook had lost five of her seven children at early ages, mostly under 18 months, 14-year-old Robert Emery hanged himself in a fit of lunacy owing to the loss of his sight, James Staughton had seen his six-year-old ‘accidentally’ drowned in a pond, as had James Anvill and Thomas Russell, whose widow had come to Charity’s aid.

Unable to find peace in Great Paxton, Charity Izzard lived out her life in St. Neots, but there too she was cruelly treated due to her reputation as a witch. She died in January 1838, aged 93, starting the gossip going again.

The Rev Isaac Nicholson remains in the parish although eleven out of twelve of his parishioners still condemn him for taking Charity into his house. He's known as the 'Vicar of Three Steeples' – Toseland, Great and Little Paxton – all of which the invisible witch used to visit on her broomstick.

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Whilst some parsons were attacked for protecting witches, others had their homes burnt around them. This was the experience of the Rev Charles Robert Maxwell of Exning

When his Parsonage House destroyed by fire in 1821 it was purely accidental – probably. After the most careful and candid investigation it was concluded that the fire was caused from an over-heated oven just before sun set in the height of summer. Though why was it alight at that time of night? As darkness descended the house presented an awful appearance and it was obviously doomed.

But there was worse: sparks were blown on to the woodwork enclosing the bell at the top of the church spire which caught fire. It was then that the parish clerk sprang into action; he clambered up the spire and, drawing up buckets of water by means of a rope, saved the church from destruction.

All this in a community that had been so frequently attacked by arsonists that no insurance office would cover any house in the village. Many Exning inhabitants, including all of the respectable classes, still tremble as they dwell upon the memory of past events. Even the pleasure they derived from a contemplation of the many new and neat houses scattered through the village - which give it the aspect of peculiar cheerfulness and comfort- is embittered by the reflection that all this cleanliness and neatness has been obtained by sacrifices which its inhabitants could but slenderly afford. Goods and chattels, live stock, farming stock, animals, grain - all were frequently destroyed in one night by the act of the incendiary.

Rewards, daily and nightly watchings, notices of every description, personal activity from the magistrate to the shepherd, all was put into requisition without effect. The miscreant's hiding place could never be discovered and the work of arson seemed to go systematically as the owners of various houses received written notices of the coming destruction. Then seven years ago an old man, of very doubtful character, died in the village. He refused all spiritual consolation and every time that the nurse brought a light, during the night, to give him his medicine, he exclaimed, "Take away that light! I have had too much to do with fire in my time!" He was pressed to say more while he was taking his final breath, but stubbornly refused.

It was not the end of the incendiarism; three years ago another fire broke out; this time the culprits were discovered.

They were two of the labourers employed by Mr Hatch, the man whose property was destroyed. Hatch was one of the most respectable characters in the country—remarkable alike for the neatness of every stick and stone about him, the judicious cultivation of a fine farm of

about 600 acres and the good nature and kind-heartedness of his conduct towards all classes of society.

One night, about one o'clock in the morning, his employees left their cottage, situated within a stone's throw of the house, with some lighted peat. There is a stream to the left with a bridge across it, over which stand two cottages and to these the men made their way. They set fire to one of the hovels in which a father and mother, with seven children, were fast asleep. This was done in order to distract from their main purpose —the destruction of Mr. Hatch's dwelling-house and farm. They hoped that people would believe that the sparks from the accidental fire of this cottage, might have been the cause.

In fact they plunged a flaming brand or two into a bean and a com stack, and set fire to a shed close to the house. The wind (blowing from the side of the cottages) was high and the flames were quick in spreading destruction on all sides. By morning light, every tiling was bare and desolate. The house was gutted, the sheds and stacks were burnt to the ground. At least the live stock was saved—for, about two in the morning, Mrs. Hatch's youngest child which was nursed at the breast, became troublesome, and, crying, disturbed the mother. She awoke, and, finding the chamber in a blaze of light, roused her husband. In five minutes, the whole household was in state of agitation and activity. Thus the animals avoided a horrible death. The cottagers were also providentially saved. Of the miscreants, one was hung, and the other was transported for life.

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Life at Exning had quietened down since the arrival of a new incumbent, Thomas Frognall Dibdin. He was the prolific author of travel books, anecdotal and gossipy works on book collecting and a study on the mansion of Lord Spencer at Althorp who had been instrumental in gaining Dibdin the position of Vicar.

It was Dibdin's first ecclesiastical preferment and he had not been idle. The church roofs and tower had been substantially repaired with a new dial-plate fixed on the east and west sides; there was a new bell on the summit upon which the clock strikes and the five bells within the tower had been rehung – though rarely put into tuneful exercise.

Inside the church the brick pavement of the north and south aisles had been relaid and the altar refitted with blue cloth. Should the congregation's minds wander they could read the Commandments, Creed and Lord's Prayer newly repainted upon new boards or the names of ancient benefactors and the description of parish property now inscribed in gilt letters on two large boards occupying a conspicuous place in the transepts. Nor was this the end of his innovations: several new pews had been fixed in the south transept and the singing gallery enlarged.

These ecclesiastical repairs and improvements were effected without taking a shilling from the pockets of the parishioners, being funded by the Lacey's Estate. But Dibdin was quick to acknowledge that it could not have been done without the judicious and prudent administration of the church and parish purses by the Churchwarden, Mr. Edward Hancock. He had held that situation upwards of twenty years, equally the friend of the poor and the rich.

Within a few years of his appointment to Exning, Dibdin gained an additional living when he was presented to the newly-established parish of St Mary's in Bryanstone Street, Marylebone. He threw himself whole-heartedly into the new challenge and delivered the first sermon at the

consecration of the new church in 1824. His sermon was published to critical acclaim – and to a virulent, anonymous attack by one of the parishioners who complained to the Bishop that it smacked of heresy.

Soon other members of his congregations came to bring their problems to his attention. They included the Governor and Deputy Governor of the Bank of England who found themselves greatly stressed when the financial world was thrown into chaos in 1825 through the collapse of investments in South America. Everybody, young and old, had been bewitched and rushed to invest their money- you had only to put your name down for shares in the Rio de la Plata or other South American mines and tomorrow a purchaser would give you fifty per cent extra for each share, they had been told. Now they were worthless and the doors of the bank were besieged with people crying 'help us or we perish'.

Though he had avoided such speculation Dibdin was also hit. He had received an advance of nearly £3,000 in anticipation of his edition of a new copy of Fox's Book of Martyrs, an Introduction to the Classics and his latest multi-volume 'English Tour'. These publications were now postponed and finding the money to repay it caused him great financial difficulties. Thomas returned to his family in Exning to regain his strength, leaving strict instructions that he was to receive no letters whilst he was recuperating.

Then one day when walking in the churchyard he noticed a new grave being dug. This surprised him as he'd been was unaware of any death in the community. On his return to the Vicarage he found two letters, each sealed with black wax. They bought him the most terrible news: that grave was for his elder and only surviving son! The lad had been presented to a cavalry-cadetship in Bengal where he had fallen victim to a bout of illness, as most men did. Recovering he had done his duty well, being promoted to Senior Lieutenant, only to die at Muttra aged 26.

Afterwards his father has returned to minister in London but not before arranging another addition to the Exning church: a memorial to his son, Francis Dibdin, from his brother officers in India. It was ironic for Thomas himself had been born in Calcutta and both his mother and father had died on the journey back to England when he'd been four years old.

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Exning had seen other improvements beyond the walls of the church. What was formerly a footbridge has been made a bridge for wagons and cattle to pass over the small stream that is by Fabian's Spring. This is remarkably clear cold and shallow, yet never frozen even during the hardest winter. It is famous for is pickerel, a fish about the size of a minnow, without which the whole of the Newmarket horseracing establishment would grind to a halt.

For ever since racehorses had been poisoned back in 1811 the jockey boys come to Exning to catch these fish and put them into the water from which the horses drink. If the little animal appears to be alive and merry for certain time the horses are allowed to slake their thirst uninjured. Daniel Dawson had been convicted and hanged for the crime, but three years ago a man hung himself for having committed the same atrocious deed and buried in the Exning churchyard.

There was no horseracing on Sunday to disturb Newmarket congregations, but the Bishop of London had recently been complaining of the impact of the sport on other parishes. His Lordship, when a young Reverend Charles James Blomfield, had ministered at Great Chesterford for nine years as both curate and vicar and was well aware of the problems the races caused on one of the most sacred days of the year, Easter Sunday. Newmarket meetings started on the Monday and the greater part of the visitors went down the day before, usually

reaching Chesterford about the time of the afternoon service. He had told the Select Committee on the Observance of the Sabbath Day what this meant:

“I have known on some occasions more than 40 pair of horses change there in the course of the Sunday afternoon. Of course the number of persons usually employed in the service of the inn (for there is only one posting-house there, which is situated very near to the church,) is by no means sufficient for this extra demand, and therefore a number of young men in the parish, who are at other times employed as agricultural labourers, are called on to assist the regular stable servants of tile inn. But the evil done by breaking in upon the Sabbath duties of these persons, comparatively few in number, was trifling with respect to the mischief produced on almost the whole population.

“The company who visit Newmarket consist not only of persons of bad character, of no rank or station in society, but of many of the first nobility and gentry of the land. It was a common custom, not only of the people of my own parish, but of all the neighbouring parishes within five or six miles, to come, and, as they phrased it, see the gentry go down to Newmarket. The consequence was that all that part of the parish in which the church was situated, was crowded with spectators from the neighbourhood, all of whom were of course absent from their own village churches. Booths were erected along the road, beer sold, and the usual inducements to gambling and drinking which are commonly met with on those occasions.

“There used to be a great clamour and noise in consequence of the calling aloud for change of horses and for new packs of cards, it being very common for some of the parties travelling to employ themselves in playing cards in open carriages along the road ; these cards were frequently thrown out into the road, between the inn and the church, sometimes with the most fearful execrations on the bad luck of the gamblers, and fresh cards were called for, which were supplied in the sight of the assembled multitude. In short, Easter Sunday, with the exception of the limited congregation who attended church on that day, and the greater number of whom hurried out at the conclusion of the service to witness the sight, was employed partly in intemperance and rioting, and partly in witnessing the gross and indecent violation of the Sabbath by their superiors.

“Upon my taking charge of the parish, I endeavoured to put a stop to the booths selling beer, and other practices of a like nature upon that occasion and by personal representations to my parishioners, and by conversation with many of the parties who were in the habit of attending, I succeeded without any interference on the part of the magistrates. But I found it impossible to stop the large assemblage of the people, and it was vain to argue with them as to the impropriety of coming together for such purposes on the Lord's-day, because I was always met with this argument, that if it be right for our superiors to travel to Newmarket on the Lord's day, it cannot be wrong for us to go to see them”

But he had some success, although the Duke of York had refused to cancel his own Sunday travelling, he did confirm that he always took a bible and prayer book in the carriage with him. Then a few years later his campaign proved successful and the Jockey Club delayed the start of the meeting until the Tuesday

A. Blomfield. A memoir of Charles James Blomfield … vol.1, 1863 – Internet Archive

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Whilst some clerics were concerned about the disruption caused by horse races, other were more worried about bull running. This ancient, and to many ideas, barbarous sport had died out in most places of the Kingdom, but it continued to be a major part of the social and political life of Stamford. Tradition told how 500 years earlier Earl Warren had seen two bulls fighting for a cow in one of his meadows. A butcher, who owned one of the bulls used his dog

to drive it into town, where it was attacked by other dogs. Enraged the bull had dashed through Stamford, terrorising everyone who got in the way. The Earl was so enchanted by the sight that he gave the field as a common to the town butchers on condition that they should find a mad bull to continue the sport on the 14th of November each year. Delighted with the sport the towns' people subscribed for a second annual bull running just after Christmas and there were others on special occasions, the parliamentary candidates being always willing to give a bull for the purpose.

In 1788 the mayor tried to stop it, saying it was contrary to religion, law and nature - though perhaps he was more concerned about the disruption caused to the numerous stage coaches making their way up the Great North Road. He was backed by the Earl of Exeter from Burleigh House but despite their protestations the bull was run and both the earl and mayor were insulted by the mob.

Next year the Mayor summoned a troop of dragoons and met the bull at St George's Gate as it was being driven into the town by the bull woman. But when he ordered the soldiers to stop the procession they refused, saying that the people were just peaceably walking on the highway. The dragoons then joined in the fun and the bull was run as usual.

But in 1829 a Baptist minister, Rev Joseph Winks was horrified by what he witnessed: "On the Sunday the street was closed at all its avenues with wagons in which were numbers of men women and children. The doors and lower windows of the houses were strongly barricaded but the upper windows and the tops of the houses were crowded with people, as were the walls, haystacks, hovels and any other vantage point. The street was thronged with men and boys and I was surprised and disgusted to observe several women amongst the crowd. Aged men hardly able to walk were to be seen moving towards this scene anxious to witness a repetition of such exploits as they when young had often performed. The crowd was greatest around the hovel or stable in which the bull was confined. Several times it was announced that the animal was coming before at length it was turned out.

"It ran by the house in which I stood closely followed by hundreds of men and boys who surrounded it on all sides with uplifted sticks, caps and hats, shouting and yelling. The bull was rather timid than wild and seemed anxious to escape from the crowd. Some connoisseurs remarked as it went by 'Good for nothing. Not worth two pence' and so on. They thus pursued it up and down the streets for about half an hour - they threw buckets of water in its face and brought out dogs to attack it- all these expedients however would not vex the poor beast so as to make it riotous"

So it was locked back in its stable, the bullards dispersed to the public houses and the Rev Winks prayed all was over. But within the hour he heard cries of 'It's in the river it's in the river'. He put on his hat and went out again.

"The bull was swimming down the river, its head only appearing above the water. On either side of the river were hundreds of men, women and children hallooing and shouting, afraid the animal would escape from them. Two or three boats pushed off in pursuit, others met it in the stream and succeeded in forcing it out of the water. The animal stood fatigued with swimming, shivering with cold and incapable of resistance. Its agony was not done: once more it was chased, again it took to the river where a line of coal boats prevented its escape and several respectably dressed men in a small boat drove it towards land where it moaned most piteously.

"By now it was obvious the sport was over, for lame, trembling and exhausted it could scarcely walk. So they led it by the horns through a few streets of the town giving three shouts at the houses of those inhabitants who favoured the custom. The poor worn out animal was

now conducted into its prison. It was intended to bring it forth again in the evening by torch light but the poor creature was almost too feeble to move and they shot it next morning"

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The Stamford Baptist minister's graphic description of the horror of bull-running brought the issue to the attention of the newly-formed Society for Prevention of Cruelty to Animals. In 1833 it sent one its officers to the town on bull running day but his interference was much resented and instead of discouraging the practice the townsfolk were stimulated to support it: who or what was this London Society that presumed to interfere with our ancient amusement.

In 1836 they returned in numbers, sending several officers who were promptly assaulted. This was cruelty to men, so the Society issued indictments against eight locals who were arrested and sent for trial. Once more the townsfolk rallied, even people who opposed the bull running subscribed to a defence fund and the manager of Stamford theatre staged a benefit performance of Cobnan's comedy of 'John Bull' to raise more cash for the legal fight.

The Londoners employed the leading barristers who won the legal arguments, but to no avail: most of the accused were acquitted and the others granted bail. The bullards saw this as a victory and determined to celebrate by a grand bull run in 1837.

But by now pressure was brought to bear on the Home Secretary. He wrote to the mayor urging him to take active measures to prevent a proceeding so illegal and disgraceful. The mayor accordingly swore in more than two hundred special constables, but their opposition being lukewarm the bull was run with greater éclat than ever.

In 1838 the Home Secretary determined to put down the custom. A troop of the 14th Dragoons and a strong force of Metropolitan Police were sent to Stamford where a considerable body of special constables were sworn in. Having viewed the field of action they decided that prevention was better than cure and realised there could be no bull run without a bull. The town was strictly searched and two bulls confined in an inn yard under a picket of dragoons. Sentries were then placed on all entrances to the town and soldiers patrolled the roads night and day to prevent a bull from being brought in.

The eventful day arrived and though the streets were crowded with bullards the authorities were perfectly at their ease. They even heard with complacency the bell of St Mary's toll the time honoured bull warning. But at the last stroke of the bell their security was rudely dissipated by the well known shouts of 'Hoy bull hoy' from a thousand voices and a noble bull appeared as if by magic in the principal street. There never was such a run!

The wild excitement of the scene was enhanced by the bewildered dragoons galloping thither and hither in vain attempts to secure the animal. The Metropolitan Police with greater valour than discretion formed in a compact phalanx on the bridge, but the bull dashed through them as an eagle might through a cobweb. After a run of some hours the bull came to bay in the river and was captured by the authorities.

An attempt was then made to rescue one of the bulls confined in the inn yard. This led to a collision between the military and the people; stones and brickbats were thrown and sabre cuts returned in exchange, but when the Dragoons were ordered to load with ball cartridge the mob dispersed.

So where had the strange bull, a very valuable animal, so miraculously spring from? It was soon claimed by a certain noble lord who said he had been sending it in a covered wagon from one of his estates to another and by a curious coincidence it just happened to pass

through Stamford on the very day and hour its presence was required by the bullards. They'd seized the wagon and released the animal. Not everybody believed him and there were many a toast drunk at the way the townsfolk had again outwitted outside authority.

It was obvious that mere military force could never stop the Stamford bull-running but such manpower was expensive and that charge had to be borne by the town authorities. This money could be better spent on other things so it now looked as if the council might agree to voluntarily give up this particular custom provided the soldiers stayed away.

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The cruelty of bull-baiting was not confined to Stamford. It had once formed part of the amusements of Cambridge with a bull-ring on the market place. Both Queen Elizabeth and King James I had issued proclamations against it but in 1620 a famous bull had arrived in the town. It had been planned to bait it on the Gogmagog hills as part of a six-week festival of bowling, running, jumping, shooting and wrestling under the designation of the 'Olympic Games'. But the University had succeeded in preventing it.

The practice of tormenting bulls on Shrove Tuesdays had lingered on at Wisbech until about 1792. The poor beast was brought out from an especially quaint old building on the site of Mr. Oldham's shop on the Market Place, tied to a stake surrounded by a circular barrier of wagons and assaulted by fierce dogs.

As soon as the crowd got tired of this amusement it was counted high sport to remove one of the wagons out of the circle and allow the maddened brute to run amuck through the streets whither he would. Sometimes the enraged animal would rush wildly through shops. On one occasion a butcher who had his store at the corner nearest the Ship Inn was weighing beef on a large pair of scales when the bull rushed wildly among the pots and pans, dashing out with the scales dangling from its horns.

A reward of five shillings could be claimed by anyone possessed of sufficient pluck and agility to seize the enraged beast by its tail. A barber named Squire succeeded in performing this feat, but at fearful cost to himself. He, evidently plucky as he was, lacked the skill displayed by matadors or toreadors in the Spanish bullfights, for the animal, with a sudden turn, caught him on its horns and tossed him. Squire did not die there and then, but suffered such severe internal injuries that he never recovered.

Wisbech hairdressers had a reputation of being brave men, indeed one rejoiced in the name of 'Valiant'. Another was Jacob Wilkinson, an old soldier who had been one of the storming party at the celebrated siege of Badajoz during the Peninsular War where he quickly possessed himself of a rich booty in the shape of Spanish doubloons, only to be robbed of them again as speedily, while he, and numbers of his fellow soldiers, lay drunk from the plunder of the city wine-cellars.

Jacob had many a tale to tell of the horror of that Spanish siege where over 3,000 of his comrades had been killed in fierce fighting and how he'd spent a night like a half-drowned rat having fallen into a river up to his neck in water with fire-balls flying above him

The morning after the battle had finally been won it had been apparent just how badly his officers had been mauled. One had got a musket ball in the right ear which came out of the back of the neck – he'd survived but his head got a twist and he was always looking over his right shoulder. Of the others Beckwith had lost a leg, Pemberton and Manners were each shot in the knee, Loftus Gray had a gash in his lip, Eeles was without a thumb, Percival shot

through the lungs and George Simmons' riddled body was only held together by a pair of stays.

But amidst the crying and dying in that Spanish carnage, one local man had found a wife! Fierce as the fighting had been, worse was to follow as soldiers took their revenge. Amongst the rapine and ruin of that ravaged city, two women made their way towards a group of officers. They were obviously high-bred ladies but now dishevelled with blood still trickling down their necks, caused by the wrenching of their ear-rings through the flesh by the hands of worse than savages, who would not take the trouble to unclasp them! The elder was wife to a Spanish officer but her house was now a wreck and they had nowhere to lay their heads, get a change of raiment or a morsel of bread.

Her sister, a girl of fourteen had been in a convent and was an angel: a being more transcendingly lovely than Jacob had ever before seen. Now she was seeking somebody to look after her.

Two officer rose to the challenge. One was Henry Kincaid, the other Harry Smith from Whittlesey.

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When Harry Smith had departed the family home at Whittlesey to be a soldier he left behind his father, a surgeon, his mother, the daughter of the vicar of Whittlesey St Andrew, and ten brothers and sisters. It would be the last time they were together.

The news trickled back of how Harry had fought many battles and endured many hardships before he found himself engaged in the most bloody siege of the Spanish city of Badajoz. The accounts of that terrible battle, conveyed daily in The Times and read aloud to the servants, had been followed by stories of rape and pillage as victorious soldiers went on the rampage.

But then stranger stories began to circulate around the fenland town of how young Captain Harry had found himself a Spanish bride. And what was worse she was ten years younger than he.

This could not be – no Catholic girl – for she was but fourteen years of age - could have willingly married a English soldier amidst the rape and ravage of that shattered city. She had apparently already endured three sieges and had cradled her brother in her arms as he died of wounds. In the circumstances nobody could blame he for seeking a protector but it was certainly not a 'marriage' that would survive the hardships of a military campaign.

But, as the months passed, it seemed as if it might. For this convent girl was travelling around with him from campaign to campaign, sharing the dangers and privations, the hardships and fatigues, of a restless life of war in every quarter of the globe. By day she rode with the baggage train, by night they rested by the camp fire roasted on one side, cold on the other until the embers died down and then retired to a hard mattress on the floor. Harry's letters described how on one occasion a sudden storm of rain hit: "In ten seconds it came down through the roof of our black-earth sods, and, literally in a moment, we were drenched to the skin and as black as chimney-sweepers. We were in the month of November as wet as a drowned rat, with nothing to eat and no cover from the falling deluge. The buoyant spirits of my wife, and the ridiculous position we were in, made her laugh herself warm"

This Juana Maria de Los Dolores de Leon, was one of the oldest of the notoriously old

Spanish, not Moorish, families. When they met she could sing and dance, but not ride – but she learned, riding side-saddle on a great brute of a Portuguese horse. One day upon a greasy bank, the animal slipped up and fell on her, breaking a small bone in her foot. The pain was intense but she would not be left behind: 'Get me a mule or an ass, and put a Spanish saddle for a lady on it; my feet will rest upon the foot-board, and go I will!' she'd exclaimed and despite the difficulties so she did. At the end of the march, when it was time to dismount the quantity of officers' cloaks spread for her reception, combined with the 'Take care! Now I'll carry the leg,' of the kind-hearted doctor proved just what a favourite she had become with the officers and men of the regiment.

In the campaign of 1812 Harry was so afflicted with boils, he could hardly ride so he swapped his horse for an Portuguese animal and three Spanish doubloons, a fortune in those days. These Juana put up most carefully in his portmanteau among his few shirts, but on the march the motion of the mule shook them out of place. The doubloons were gone, and all their fortune! Her horror, poor girl, was profound, though in the context of the other hardships and privations they shared were minimal.

Then during one battle Harry's horse fell beneath him, as if dead, and a report soon circulated that he had been killed. The news spread to his wife, who followed close to the rear on the very field of battle, crossing the plain with the treasure they had acquired. As soon as the fighting ceased she set out to recover his body, weeping miserably.

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Juana Smith, nee Los Dolores de Leon, the Spanish teenage wife of a British soldier, set off to retrieve his body from the carnage of the battlefield. She recalled the experience: "The journey from Brussels to the field almost maddened me, with wounded men and horses, and corpses for interment, expecting as I was every moment to see that of my husband. The road was nearly choked which was to lead me to the completion, as I hoped, of my life: to die on the body of the only thing I had on earth to love, and which I loved with a faithfulness which few can or ever did feel, and none ever exceeded.

"In my agony of woe I approached the awful field of Sunday's carnage, in mad search of Enrique. I saw signs of newly dug graves, and then I imagined to myself, 'O God, he has been buried, and I shall never again behold him!' How can I describe my suspense, the horror of my sensations, my growing despair, the scene of carnage around me? From a distance I saw a figure lying; I shrieked. 'Oh, there he is!' I galloped on. No, It is not he! Find him I will, but whither shall I turn?"

"At this moment, as a guardian angel, a dear and mutual friend, Charlie Gore, A.D.C. to Sir James Kempt, appeared to me. In my agony and hope, hope alone of finding the body, I exclaimed, Oh, where is he! Where is my Enrique?"

The reply stunned her: 'Why, near Bavay by this time, as well as ever he was in his life; not wounded even, nor either of his brothers'. She could not believe it, but he was adamant 'Dearest Juana, believe me; it is poor Charles Smyth, Pack's Brigade- Major. I swear to you, on my honour, I left Harry riding Lochinvar in perfect health, but very anxious about you'.

This sudden transition from the depth of grief and maddening despair was enough to turn her brain. Harry – her beloved 'Enrique' - had returned to Brussels to see poor Charlie Beckwith, who had lost, or must lose, his leg. It was there that finally she found him: "Until I saw him, I could not persuade myself he was well, such a hold had my previous horror taken of my every thought and feeling. Soon, O gracious God, I sank into his embrace, exhausted, fatigued, happy, and grateful — oh, how grateful! — to God who had protected him, and sustained my

reason through such scenes of carnage, horror, dread, and belief in my bereavement"

Harry Smith although alive and unwounded was unable to speak. His horse had been felled by the wind of a cannon-shot exploding nearby, Harry had jumped off and began to look for any wound but could see none, so he gave the poor animal a kick on the nose at which it immediately shook its head and as instantly jumped up. Harry had remounted and continued the battle. He had lost his voice in the cheers at the victory. But it took a good deal of reassurance before his wife would believe she were not a widow after all.

Then in 1814 Napoleon was – it seemed – finally beaten. The young couple found themselves together in a delightfully furnished chateau with a French cook, and celebrated extravagantly. There were theatres, balls and fetes, an abundance of food, drink, and raiment, as the indolence of repose succeeded the energetic and exciting occupation of a relentless and cruel war. Their supreme happiness was to be short-lived for there was another war, this time across the Atlantic and this time Juana could not accompany her British soldier.

Harry noted in his journal: "I must leave behind my young, fond and devoted wife. My heart was ready to burst. I shall never forget her frenzied grief when, with a sort of despair, I imparted the inevitable separation that we were doomed to suffer, after all our escapes, fatigue, and privation"

Juana could not return to her own family – she had deserted them and denounced her religion to love a foreign soldier. Now she was to be expatriated, to go among strangers, and lose the only thing on earth her life hung on and clung to. But not to the family home at Whittlesey – that would be far too traumatic an experience on top of all the other hardships she had endured. Instead she was sent to London in one of the transports that were ferrying back the wounded and maimed soldiers. There she was to learn English and wait for Harry to return from his latest adventures.

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The news of how through the exertions of soldiers like Harry Smith of Whittlesey, Napoleon had been beaten and a treaty signed in Paris between France and the Allies – Britain, Germany and Russia - reached Cambridge on the 27th June 1814

This was something to celebrate and so the Mayor and Corporation breakfasted at the Town Hall before proceeding around the town with a band of music in a grand procession, reading the proclamation at various points. Shops and colleges illuminated their premises – Mr Deighton the bookseller decorated four of his windows, depicting 'Peace and Plenty', 'Peace and Commerce', a soldier and a sailor returned from war and a shepherd watching his sheep – we didn't know then what was to happen when prices collapsed, Elliott Smith lamented.

Then when a real hero, the Prussian General Blucher – the man who had entered Paris - visited Cambridge he was mobbed. People removed the horse from his carriage and drew it themselves across Market Hill and down the steps into the Great Court of Trinity College where there was a superb banquet to 500 of the University great and good.

Many of the leading figures of the town dined together at the Red Lion and decided that this was something that even the poorer classes should celebrate with a public dinner. Various Committees were set up to make the arrangements – they had to find 5,368 pounds of beef, 5,802 penny loaves, 451 pounds of Gloucester cheese and much more, together with tables, table cloths and 480 salt saucers.

A bandstand was erected in the middle of Parker's Piece, crowned with the Union flag and the standard captured from the American frigate, Chesapeake. The tables were decorated with banners, streamers waved in the wind and about 6,000 guests sat down to their beef and plum puddings. Whilst they ate the orchestra played and a balloon went up. Afterwards as the lady snuff-takers enjoyed the half-a-peck supplied and the men turned to their pipes – 1,728 of them with 521 pounds of tobacco.

To keep gatecrashers away – and over 15,000 spectators came to look – rope fences were constructed through which nobody could pass unless they had a ticket, which were especially designed by Mr R.B. Harraden, the artist.

The day concluded with rustic sports on Midsummer Common that included a 'Jingle match' for a hat valued 15/-, there were the usual donkey races, a smoking match and while some chased a pig with a soaped tail, others dipped for an eel in a pail of water and six chimney-sweeps in their working clothes sifted through a bowl of flour seeking for a shilling, the one who found it receiving a prize of seven bob.

Everybody agreed it had been a perfect day, apart from three people. A gentleman and his lady were somewhat upset when their gig overturned into a ditch near Midsummer Common. They were rescued from a muddy grave but the lady's frock was ruined and her blushes only saved by a University gentleman who lent her his gown. More serious was an accident to one of the diners who fell in the crush and broke his leg, leaving his wife and family without any source of income. Two rounds of beef and half a cheese were sent to tide them over. The rest of the food was distributed to the aged and infirm to the sick in Addenbrooke's Hospital and to the prisoners in the County Gaol on Castle Hill.

Similar celebrations were staged at Ely were 3,000 dined on roast beef at Nut Holt and all joined in the singing of 'Rule Britannia' – much to the delight of Mrs Playford who had dressed herself as Britannia and was carried in procession through the city. She repeated the role at Soham a month later where 2,000 were offered roast beef and strong ale.

Sadly the rejoicings were premature. By the next March Bonaparte had escaped from Elba and was back in Paris, Blucher was forced to join with the Duke of Wellington to fight the Battle of Waterloo at which 30,000 were killed and over 58,000 wounded. But it was to reunite Harry Smith and his Spanish child-bride.

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Harry Smith and his young wife had been finally parted when he was ordered overseas to fight in the American wars. Juana was to leave her native Spain to make her home in London, a strange city in a strange country, whose strange language, English, she could not speak very well.

Now he was back, but where was she? On arrival in London he spotted a face he knew, that of a brother officer who had been with her only the day before. Harry hastened to the address: "Soon I was in Panton Square, with my hand on the window of the coach, looking for the number of the house, when I heard a shriek, 'Oh Dios, la mano de mi Enrique!' Never shall I forget that shriek; never shall I forget the effusion of our gratitude to God, as we held each other in an embrace of love few can ever have known, cemented by every peculiarity of our union and the eventful scenes of our lives". Their reunion was as tempestuous as some of their experiences on the battlefield!

His wife had refused all entreaties to leave London before his return. She had never met his family, nor glimpsed the ancestral home at Whittlesey. Harry sent for his father for a long

overdue reunion: they had not seen each other for seven momentous years. It was then time to introduce his teenage bride. “I led him to believe she was of the stiff Spanish school, as stately as a swan and about as proud as a peacock. She liked the fun of the deception, and promised to dress in full Spanish costume, and act up to the supposition. In she came - but in place of acting either the swan or the peacock, she bounded into my father’s arms, who cried like a child, between joy, admiration, astonishment and delight at seeing so young and beautiful a creature who had gone through so much, and showed a heart evidently framed for love”, Harry recorded in his journal.

Juana was nearly eighteen but already a woman and a person of most distinguished appearance, especially in her Spanish costume. Not handsome, for she had the dark complexion of her countrywomen, but her figure was beautiful and she had a profusion of the darkest brown hair. Her teeth, though not regular, were as white as pearls with a voice most silvery and sweet in conversation. She was animated and intelligent and her pronunciation of English was most fascinating. When she wanted a word, the brilliancy and expression of the eye would supply it, it flashed perpetually as she spoke.

She had immediately captivated his father, but how would she be received by his brothers and sisters in Whittlesey. Together made the coach journey back to the fens, arriving at the Falcon Inn, where his wife was welcomed wholeheartedly by almost the whole family. There was one notable absentee, for whilst Harry had been fighting, his mother had been dying. He took his bride to her grave and together they wept.

Then for three weeks they explored his childhood home: the vast Whittlesey mere where duck and mosquitoes abounded and its two churches - St Mary's known as the High Church because of the spire and St Andrew's the Low Church with its tower. As a lad Harry had often gone to one in the morning and the other in the afternoon - but it was St Mary's which stuck in his memory - "I can remember my mother smiling down on me as I stood on the seat in the high square pew and I can see the Beadle in his livery - drab breeches and black coat with red collar and cuffs creeping stealthily round the aisles during the service, wand in hand, to ensure order among the boys”, he recalled. It was there he been educated in a small Grammar school partitioned off from the south aisle. But schooling could often be interrupted - mothers would bring sick children to be baptised or they'd be a funeral or a wedding when the lads would be left to their own devices; if they made too much noise the clerk in the church would come and tap on the wall to keep them quiet.

Life was tranquil and peaceful and it was not to last. Just across the channel the sounds of battle were calling again. When Harry – now Major Smith - heard from Sir John Lambert that he was to join the army assembling at Brussels under the Duke of Wellington his response was immediate. Carnage and gore was something he knew well. He would need horses, and he would need his wife.

All was now excitement, joy, hope and animation with the preparation of riding-habits, tents, canteens, and the other paraphernalia of war. Meanwhile his sisters were thinking of all sorts of things for his wife’s comfort, which they could as well have carried as the parish church. His youngest brother but one, Charles, was to go with then to join the 1st Battalion Rifle Brigade as a Volunteer. Harry never was more happy in all his life, for his wife was going and all the agony of parting was spared. Ahead lay the battle of Waterloo.

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The Battle of Waterloo had been a magnificent victory – but won at terrible cost. Harry Smith of Whittlesey together with his wife and both his brothers survived, but the scene was still vivid, over 20 years later:

“At Waterloo the whole field from right to left was a mass of dead bodies. In one spot, to the right of La Haye Sainte, the French Cuirassiers were literally piled on each other, many soldiers not wounded lying under their horses, others, fearfully wounded, occasionally with their horses struggling upon their wounded bodies. The sight was sickening and I had no means or power to assist them. All over the field you saw officers, and as many soldiers as were permitted to leave the ranks, leaning and weeping over some dead or dying brother or comrade, some still in perfect possession of their intellect and game to the last regarded their recovery as more than probable, others perfectly sensible of their dissolution, breathing into your keeping the feelings and expressions of their last moments — messages to father, mother, wife, or dearest relatives”.

But then when it was finally over some of the men who had seen such carnage returned to their Cambridgeshire homes. Thomas Chapman returned to Comberton, Edward Eden and Edmund Webb came back to Soham, their friend Joseph Pollard did not. Many turned their back on William Freeman when he arrived at his native village of Pampisford having fought with the Coldstream Guards. It was the vivid wound he carried that scared them: at the very close of the battle he’d been hit in the head by a bullet which entered very near the right eye and was taken out by his left ear. Yet such was his constitution that within nine weeks he’d been back at his duty carrying with him the bullet that had nearly taken his life. This he would proudly display to anybody who enquired, together with his medals – though often these were pawned to bring him money to buy bread.

Not all had served on land: William Hoare had spent his fighting life in the Royal Marines on warships searching the English Channel and North Sea for French and American privateers. A tough and gallant fighter, he was eventually promoted to sergeant while serving under the command of Admiral Sir Joseph Yorke, half-brother of Earl Hardwicke of Wimpole Hall. Whilst at sea he always carried a well worn copy of the Bible which he would read during the long hours of confinement below deck learning by heart the verses relating to the exciting exploits of Joshua and Gideon. When the war was over, now well into middle age and weary of conflict he willingly accepted a small pension and his discharge.

But like many men he found the hardships of war gave way to the misery of poverty. He had no family, no home and no employment. So, wearing his old uniform and carrying a knapsack containing all his worldly possessions, he began wandering along the roads from town to town and village to village searching for somewhere to settle down. But he was hustled from place to place, Overseers fearing that if he stayed too long he would become a burden on the parish poor relief.

Bill Hoare was harried out of Ely and on towards Littleport and the black emptiness of the wet lands beyond. But when he noticed a piece of waste ground covered with weeds, wild blackberry and hawthorn he decided to claim it for himself and build a cottage in which he could live out the remainder of his years. He cleared the site and constructed a rough shelter from the branches of an uprooted hawthorn and reeds gathered from a nearby drain. But news of the old soldier squatting on the waste ground at the bottom of Portley Hill spread rapidly through Littleport, and the villagers, having a natural mistrust and dislike of strangers, decided to chuck him out of their parish. Late at night a gang came and pulled up the fence he had erected around his claim, then jeered and chanted abuse at him. But Hoare had faced fiercer enemies, and was determined not to be intimidated, so he stood his ground.

William Hoare had spent much of his life fighting for his country. Now he prepared to fight for his home – even if that home was only a rough shelter of wood and reeds beside the road just outside Littleport.

The report of a vagrant making himself a home in the parish was ill-received by Isaac Taylor, the Overseer of the Poor. The post-war depression had affected Littleport severely. Many farm labourers had been thrown out of work and there'd been an increased demand for poor relief.

According to the Law of the land as serving overseer Isaac had forty days to decide either to grant the vagrant the right to settle, or order him to leave. It did not take him that long to make up his mind: he ordered the removal of the old soldier. Out went the parish constables, together with a gang of bullies, to forcibly evict Hoare and escort him to the parish boundary with a threat that if he ever returned he could expect the same treatment. Then, satisfied that they had won, they watched Hoare trudge along the road until he was out of sight.

But as far as William was concerned the battle had only just begun. He made his way across Cambridgeshire to Wimpole Hall, the home of the Earl of Hardwicke, who was also Lord of the Manor of Littleport. At first the Earl would not admit him, but things changed when he heard that Hoare had served during the French wars, under his cousin, Admiral Sir Joseph Sydney Yorke. Hardwicke invited him in and listened to the old man's account of his troubles. He agreed to write to the Littleport magistrate, the Reverend Vachell, instructing him to permit the old man to reside permanently in the parish on the plot that he had chosen. Vachell reluctantly complied with the Earl's wishes. William returned to Littleport in triumph and when he had finished building his cottage erected a board bearing an inscription from the Bible to remind everyone of his victory: "The name of the place shall be called Gilgal unto this day".

It was from there that he'd witnessed Parson Vachell's flight in the middle of the night and there too he'd seen the cavalry charge of troops that smashed the 'Littleport rioters' a few days later. The sight of the soldiers had reminded him of his own military exploits as a sergeant of Marines serving with Admiral Yorke

Hoare considered Sir Joseph one of the finest young captains in the navy, a skilful sailor and a daring officer who identified himself with the foremast-men, adopted their slang and had a sense of humour that did as much to impose order as any number of floggings.

On one occasion he'd faced a mutiny. About six bells of the first watch the Lieutenant dashed into the cabin and announced that the men had formed two lines on the main-deck, some of them brandishing their knives as if ready for action. Yorke flew to the scene of danger. Coming totally unarmed to the head of this double line of ruffians he instantly knocked two down with his fists. Seizing the two next (men of very large stature), he drove their heads together with a force that left them stunned and stupified on the deck. He then walked fearlessly through the long line of the remainder, saying 'Have you the impudence to suppose that I would hang such a lubberly set of — as you? No, by --- I will flog every ringleader and not put the fleet to the disgrace of a trial to try such a set of ---- ' When one sailor tried to protest he knocked him down and kicked him soundly as he lay on the deck.

Yorke had taken command of the ship from an Irish captain, whose officers were all Irish – none of whom could maintain order. They had not even kept the French prisoners on board confined in the hold or properly watched. One day after a long chase of a French line-of-battle ship, during which the prisoners were allowed to look out of the port-holes and even from the chains at the chase, the drum beat to quarters. On clearing the ship for action, it was found that every breeching of the main-deck guns was cut through and several of the lanyards of the main and mizen shrouds had been cut to a few yarns with sharp knives.

Probably no other man in the service could have reduced such a ship's company to so perfect a state of discipline, and in so short a period as Sir Joseph. There'd been drunkenness, riots, and fighting, insolence to the quarter-deck and – worse – some men had developed the habit of using their hammocks to avoid the trouble of visiting the head at night. By comparison even William Hoare's damp fen cottage smelled sweet!

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The Yorke family had been connected with Wimpole Hall ever since the 100-year old building had been bought by Philip, the first Earl of Hardwicke in 1741, a few years after he'd been appointed Lord Chancellor. In a 50-year political career he'd acquired immense wealth but had always managed to avoid any suspicion of prostituting his public position for private ends.

His second son, Charles, was also sworn in to the same post 1764. But this time a brilliant career ended in tragedy. He'd been elected to Parliament as member for Cambridge and gained the appointment first of Solicitor, then Attorney-General. But it was after the Duke of Grafton became Prime Minister during the political turmoil of 1770 that Charles was offered the Lord Chancellorship. He was reluctant to accept since it would involve him advising on various contentious issues, though his brother urged that it was too great a thing to refuse and his wife, Agneta, agreed.

After a restless night he consented to go to court where the King himself exerted pressure, threatening an end to their friendship if he refused to take up the appointment. The pressure prevailed. That evening Charles Yorke returned home from the Palace bearing with him the Great Seal and the promised title of 'Baron of Morden in the County of Cambridge'. But he was worried. Not once that night did he close his eyes and by morning he had determined to return the Great Seal, saying if he kept it he could not live. Indeed at six o'clock his wife found him so ill that she sent for a doctor who ordered him some medicine and promised to return again in the evening.

In the meantime Charles was obliged to get out of bed to receive the different people who crowded to congratulate him on the appointment, telling each that he was determined to resign the post and retire out of public life. All this worried his wife who became so worn out with fatigue and anxiety that she could not eat. That evening she found him in a state of fixed melancholy. Agneta tried every method to wake and amuse him but it without result. He grew much worse and after talking a strong opiate fell asleep until the middle of the night. He awoke delirious and was seized with a vomiting of blood. On taking her hands he asked how to replay her kindness: "My dear love; God will reward you, I cannot; be comforted." he told her. Charles lived till the next day, when at five o'clock in the afternoon, he died. Many speculated that he had committed suicide.

The Hardwicke family, the Wimpole estate and the county of Cambridge was devastated. The King too felt the loss and suffered some pangs of conscience at the pressure he'd exerted. With tears in his eyes he enquired after the family he seemed to forget the offer of the Baronetcy.

Many of those who flocked to Wimpole for the funeral were impressed by the grandeur of the Hall alongside the church. Much rebuilding had taken place and the interiors had been remodelled. The rooms below stairs were excellent and very handsomely furnished, the new dining room very elegant indeed. The State Bed, which had formerly been on the ground floor

had been moved upwards into one of the new rooms. The paper with which the walls were covered was common and white to match the bed, and there were two dressing-rooms belonging to it. Many of the apartments were decorated with brown wainscots, furnished in the old style with bed-curtains and hangings made of crimson damask laced with gold – though most dreadfully tarnished.

Outside much work had taken place though it appeared to some that money must have become a problem. For dominating the view was the tumbled-down remains of an ancient castle tower whose once-white walls were beginning to discolour and become cloaked in clinging ivy. Yet any impressions that it might be the remains of an ancient fortification were entirely erroneous: this was just a folly, a way of using up some of the family's fortunes.

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Wimpole Hall had passed from Philip Yorke, First Earl of Hardwicke to Philip Yorke, Second Earl and then – almost inevitably - to Philip Yorke the Third in 1790. He'd married Lady Elizabeth Lindsay, the daughter of an Earl and started begetting children to carry on his particular branch of the family. In this he'd been unlucky: although they'd had several daughters who had thrived, the sons all died. The first lad – Philip (what else) had been drowned in a shipwreck in the Baltic, the second died before his fifth birthday, the third was still-born, the fourth had reached the grand old age of twelve before he died, the fifth just got to about seven months. As a result there'd be no male successor.

The new Earl played his part on the national stage. He resigned his seat as MP for Cambridgeshire on elevation to the House of Lords and was soon appointed First Lord Lieutenant of Ireland in which role he won much praise. Locally he was Lord Lieutenant and Custos Rotulorum of Cambridgeshire as well as High Steward of Cambridge University.

Hardwicke was a keen patron of the arts and went on the Grand Tour of Europe where he met an architect, John Soame, who would transform his Wimpole mansion. Over the last few years there had been a great deal of activity with the creation of a library, an extravagant neo-classical yellow drawing room and an something even more remarkable: an interior bathhouse. Outside there were new cottages for the estate workers, a new Hardwicke Arms inn at Arrington and grand lodges at the approaches to the estate, though the foundations had given way and the ornate archways cracked. This was not the only problem as when Humphry Repton was called in to improve what Capability Brown had started he'd squabbled with Soame over a new Model Farm.

The Third Earl was greatly interested in farming and accepted the position of President of the Board of Agriculture in 1814. However the heavy gault soil around Wimpole caused drainage problems and resulted in poor quality pasture. Even the park was not immune: the sheep suffered badly from rot and the deer were decimated by disease. But Yorke put in an extensive system of underground tiling drains and open ditches and diversified the traditional crops of wheat, barley, beans and peas by introducing carrots, parsnips, lettuce, and radishes, followed by a sowing of wheat. His experiments proved successful and: following deep ploughing crops of flax, barley, oats and grass gave great yields. Even his carrots did well, producing a full crop – even though many were stolen out of the fields. Next year he tried again, only to have them attacked by white snails. Parsnips did well and were sold to the poor for a shilling a bushel. He also ensured that the new cottages Soame designed had a plot of land to encourage his tenants to grow their own salad produce, awarding prizes for the best results.

But they did not have the advantage of a glasshouse, unlike his Lordship, who took great pride in the progress of the pineapples cultivated by his gardener, James Dall. By judicious repotting, careful regulation of the heat and the use of warm water he achieved fine crops of fruit, reporting his success in the Gardening Magazines, volumes of which found their way on to the new library's shelves.

All this was admired by the numerous gentry whose carriages wended their way through the Park to break their journey at Wimpole. But her Ladyship, though rich, loathed spending money. Sometimes it was necessary to serve fish for dinner but she objected to paying the fishmonger's bill. Servants gossiped about how venison from the park's surviving deer was sent down to the Temple-Bar to be exchanged for the dainties required by the extravagant guests. In this Her Ladyship was following a family tradition: the First Lady Hardwick had decorated the staterooms with a fine velvet embroidery – well her husband had been Chancellor and the purse in which the Great Seal was carried was of very expensive material. As a new purse was provided every year her Ladyship had taken great care to keep the old one and had managed to make curtains for the great bed from them.

Philip the third Earl of Hardwicke had been as a model of an English Nobleman—courteous and affable, calm and dignified, hospitable and munificent, intelligent. He was a highly accomplished scholar and a liberal patron of every charitable institution. He'd wanted his funeral to be private to deter a mass attendance by members of the University of Cambridge. But a large body of his tenantry were present at the church to pay their last respects to a kind landlord. His family were also there, including his successor as Fourth Earl – this time a Charles Philip Yorke.

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The present Earl of Hardwick, Charles Philip Yorke had never been meant to succeed to that elevated position in 1834. He was a sailor, eldest son of Admiral Sir Joseph Sidney Yorke. He'd entered the Royal Naval College and worked his way up from midshipman until reaching the rank of Captain. While commanding the Alligator in the Mediterranean he'd learned in 1831 of the death of his father who'd been drowned in a freak accident when a small yacht in which he was sailing was struck by lightning.

Charles had already decided to take up politics when his naval days were over and very shortly after he arrived in England became MP for Reigate, one of the parliamentary seats that the Yorke family commanded. But he was not there for long. In 183 1 Lord Francis Osborne, one of the Members of Parliament for Cambridgeshire stood down and Charles decided to switch his Reigate constituency for the one around Wimpole.

It was not as easy as that. For years the two great opposing political families, the Earls of Hardwicke and the Duke of Rutland had battled it out amongst themselves as to whose supporters were elected.

But in 1810 independent county voters had broken the mould and brought in Lord Francis Godolphin Osborne. Now there was talk of 'Reform', extending the franchise and having a proper distribution of parliamentary seats - well why should Cambridgeshire have three members whilst other larger counties had only two? A Reform Bill had passed through the House of Parliament by a large majority only to be rejected by the House of Lords - by people like the Hardwickes and Rutlands who would have seen their political power swept away.

Now Osborne had stood down and there was a chance to get one of their own back into the lower House. So the previously bitter rivals had sunk their differences and proposed Captain Charles. However the Cambridgeshire Independents saw it as a glorious opportunity of beating both the great powerbrokers - a thing heretofore incredible. They nominated R.G.

Townley from Fulbourn as their champion, a large resident landowner, amiable in his private life, liberal in his politics and unconnected with any rotten boroughs.

Despite being a Tory, Captain Yorke expressed himself in favour ofa moderate scheme of reform which would abolish such constituencies as were proved to be corrupt, and said he was ready to support a proper extension of the franchise. But he refused to sacrifice the agricultural interest to that of the manufacturer, and took his stand upon the necessity of affording protection to the farmer by the maintenance of the existing Com Laws.
But what could a man, used to ploughing the waves, know of the problems of those who ploughed the land, his opponents asked, quietly overlooking the agricultural developments being pioneered by the current Lord Hardwicke at his Wimpole estate.
The election was fixed for the October, the weather was [me - more like Mayor June - and early in the morning of the second day of polling voters began to pour in to Cambridge from every part of the county, many in large bodies preceded by bands of music and accompanied by flags and banners with various inscriptions and devices. From Cottenham, Willingham and the surrounding area there was a mile long procession of men. Many came on foot, some on horseback and others in various vehicles, chiefly one-horse chaises. More made their way from Wisbech and the Isle ofEly to make their declaration on the hustings.

To start with the anti-reformers made a great rally but as the day wore on it was obvious that Yorke was falling behind. So his supporters tried some of the old tricks to gain themselves an advantage. As opposing voters made their way to Parker's Piece they were taunted that Townley would be beaten and offered bets on the matter - at very good odds. But once these were taken up the Yorke faction immediately objected to that voter on the grounds that he had laid a wager on the issue. As soon as Townley saw what was happening he arranged for placards to be made and carried through the streets warning his supporters not to bet until after they'd voted. They spotted one such scam being carried out and extracted revenge on the spot, hauling the fellow to a neighbouring pond through which he was dragged three times.

Soon Parker's Piece was filled with about 7,000 people, the friends of the rival candidates good- humouredly taunting each other, but no riot or disorder of any other kind took place. Indeed the most unpopular man seemed to be the High Sheriff who was groaned at when from time to time he came to the front of the platform to announce the state of the polls.
It was bad news: each hour Yorke was further behind and by the end of the second day of voting Townley came forward to accept that he would be the Member of Parliament as the representative of the free and unbiased judgement of the freeholders of Cambridgeshire.
Charles Philip Yorke however was adamant that the battle was only half over. He'd be back to fight another day

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Charles Philip Yorke had given up a career in the navy for a safe parliamentary seat. Then he'd surrendered that to take the chance to represent the area that included Wimpole into to whose Hall he would move as soon as his uncle died. But the plans had gone wrong and he'd been ignominiously beaten.

However within a year there was another election and again Yorke took up the challenge to secure one of the two Cambridgeshire seats. His friends toured the county to canvass support for the Conservative cause but it seemed they would not find n the area around Thorney where the Duke of Bedford had his large estate. For his tenants had been ordered to give one vote for Mr Childers, one of the Whig candidates, and to withhold the second, or risk losing their farms. This most imperious control on the part of his Grace was intolerable, members of the 'True Blue and Conservative Club' at Colchester were told.

The remarks were reported in the Essex papers, then widely circulated by the national press. They reached the eyes of Tycho Wing, the Duke's steward, at Thorney Abbey who penned a letter to the Morning Chronicle to refute the claims, assuring readers that the Duke had told him, over and over again, that he did not ask his tenants to vote against their wishes, whatever his own feelings.

Jonathan Castle agreed: he had occupied a large farm as yearly tenant of His Grace for nearly 18 years and nobody had put pressure on him to vote. Another had voted for Yorke without fear of reprisals and could tell of others who did the same. For proof one only had to look at the poll book which recorded for whom each man had cast his votes. However it did not record the name of George Morris, a retired Captain in the Royal Navy. He was not a supporter of Whig principles but as his right to vote came from occupying the Duke's land he did not think it right to oppose the candidates that his landlord preferred. '

When the result was declared this time Yorke topped the poll and took his seat in the Lower House. He did not keep it for long for his uncle the Third Earl of Hardwicke finally died in 1834 and he moved across to the Lords. Then Sir Robert Peel recommended his name to King William as Lord Lieutenant of Cambridgeshire in succession to the previous Earl, something normally frowned upon.

Charles had not been idle in the meantime: he'd married Susan Liddell, daughter of Baron Ravensworth and they'd already managed to produce a son. Together they moved into the grand mansion of Wimpole Hall with its fine furniture, books and pictures only to find it was not quite as perfect as it seemed. It needed repair, the extensive roof had to be releaded, new offices built and yet more work was still needed, including the restoration of the large conservatory.

The evenings at Wimpole were never dull. There was always a sprinkling of rising men in all the practical departments of life among the guests who included statesmen, agriculturists, shipbuilders and owners, as well as friends and relations. Music was greatly encouraged and Susan's unaccompanied ballad singing was the highlight of many a night.

However Yorke himself preferred the simple life. The family's footware was made by a little hump-back cobbler who came by the avenue to the 'Big House' to measure up their feet for substantial thick boots in which with leather gaiters from the village shop, he romped with the child in paper chases over the muddy fields. He hired his own labourers for the estate and home farm and these were secure in their posts from year to year. The men wore smock frocks and very thick boots with large nails that lasted a year while the best dressed wife wore a red cloak and neat black bonnet. Their cottages were beautifully clean and the furniture solid, with a family Bible in every one.

Each year the labourers were welcome to the Hall where the old-fashioned harvest home was celebrated in the spacious coachhouse cleared for the occasion and each year His Lordship dined at Cambridge with all his tenants. But he seen the harm raw spirits had done in the Navy and this made him very careful at Wimpole. According to the old custom, beer was brewed twice a year but he personally kept the key of the cellar and punctually opened it every morning before breakfast to give out the 'measure' for daily consumption.

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At Wimpole Hall Charles Philip Yorke grappled with the problems of the period, not least a turbulent priest, the Reverend Maberly who was protesting against the radical changes being

introduced to the Poor Law. But out at Stretham another clergyman was seeking peace in his rectory following a battle in a library when one of his opponents had been the Earl of Hardwicke in his capacity as one of the Trustees of the British Museum.

Henry Hervey Baber had attended All Souls College, Oxford where he studied as a bible clerk before taking his degree and marrying a banker's daughter. He obtained a job as sub-librarian of the Bodleian Library Oxford, where he built up a reputation as a good scholar before joining the staff of the library at the British Museum in London as Assistant Keeper of Printed Books in 1807

There he experienced the same problem being suffered at Cambridge University Library: that of ensuring that the books demanded under the new Copyright Act were actually received. Every dirty trick was resorted to by publishers to evade their responsibilities. Baber produced examples of important works that were not being supplied but the Museum Trustees refused to take legal action, preferring to buy them instead. He was more successful in other areas and was promoted to the position of Keeper in 1812, acquiring a wonderful array of books and manuscripts amassed by the Rev Charles Burney.

Then in 1823 the Museum was bequeathed a large collection of books built up by King George III who'd considered that a good library was one of the most valuable additions he could make to his Palace. It came complete with its own staff who demanded the same remuneration as they had previously enjoyed as Royal librarians, which meant some were paid as much as Baber. It also came with its own catalogue – and cataloguing was something Baber knew about.

He had been working on an alphabetical catalogue of the British Museum's books for many years, struggling to keep up with accessions even when his staff came in and worked on Saturdays without pay. At last he seemed to be making good progress when the Trustees decided they wanted a subject catalogue instead. In this were backed by Henry Ellis, the Principal Librarian, a little fat man, completely out of his depth and quite incapable of worthily maintaining the high office he held. Instead he resorted to childish behaviour to curry favour with his staff, telling the juniors improper stories – something felt not appropriate for someone in such a position.

Despite Baber's protestations that it would be impractical – it would need experienced jurists to classify the legal books, geologists for the geological reports and so on - he was ordered to put the new scheme into operation. As he predicted it proved a disastrous mistake and work soon ground to a halt. Then he was criticised for misreporting the number of volumes acquired in 1833 after a bundle of uncatalogued pamphlets had been put to one side and overlooked amongst the ever-accumulating piles of material.

Elsewhere in the British Museum other developments were being put in place with new rooms constructed to house recently-discovered Egyptian sculptures and allow the Elgin marbles to be brought from the shed in the garden where they had been stored. But critics were becoming vocal: scientists attacked it for its lack of specialists, radicals for its lack of facilities for the common man and scholars condemned the arrangements in the Reading Room. Other claimed it had become a place only intended for the amusement of the curious and the rich. At length the Trustees undertook a major review of the whole of the Museum's organisation. One of their conclusions was that salaries should be increased but that staff should not hold any other paid positions.

This put Principal Librarian Baber in a quandary: he could see what needed to be done but knew too the frustrating hours of meetings that would need to be endured. He decided to quit the Library, leaving his assistant Antonio Panizzi to try and meet the demands of the Trustees.

Since 1827 the Reverend Baber had been Rector of Stretham, now he decided to move to the parish permanently. There he would enjoy a quiet life as a village minister. Inevitably it was not to be.

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Henry Baber had been appointed rector of Stretham in succession to John Henry Sparke, son of the infamous Bishop who had combined the living with that of Littlebury in Essex and Cottenham. Now he had been promoted to the very rich pickings of Leverington which he held with first Benwell then Gunthorpe in Norfolk.

That was not for Baber, he planned to be there for the rest of his life and determined to be comfortable in his new home. He drew up plans to modernise the rectory, but not before he'd looked into the building's past. The oldest part was undoubtedly the wing nearest the church which was made of squared clunch blocks that seemed to date back to the 12th century. Most of the rest had been built some 200 years later over a vaulted cellar though William Cole, the Milton antiquarian speculated that it may once have had a hall range with cross wings or a tower. It certainly included some old painted glass showing the arms of King Edward III. Then in the late 1600s it had been extended with a south wing and a timber east wing covered with plaster. This work may have been masterminded by Sir Christopher Wren whose sister, Anne, had been married to the then rector.

Now Baber made his mark with a large extension on the south end to increase the accommodation and provide service rooms and a garden verandah with a canopy to make the most of the fine garden at the rear. Then when he was nearly finished he nearly had to start all over again. For just before Christmas 1831 he discovered a kettle filled with lighted material positioned as to strongly suggest an attempted arson attack.

But what was the motive? Baber had been one of the promoters of an Inclosure scheme for Stretham that had dragged on and on and had faced down his parishioners at Little Thetford when they'd fought off police trying to ensure that the lawful process of inclosure could proceed there. Now at last the wrangling was behind them and they could move on to make the changes work.

But it was all very unsettling for those villagers who came to church each Sunday not to mention the increasing number of nonconformists. The celebrations he'd helped organise to mark the recent Coronation of Queen Victoria had been an opportunity to placate them. The donkey racing had been popular but the dinner to the poor held in Read's field had been a triumph. When people had full bellies they were less inclined to riot. But it took money to buy food and that was hard to come by, legally. In 1832 one of his parishioners, Samuel Coy, had been accused of embezzling money from the Stretham Overseers of the Poor.

It was then that Baber had made the acquaintance of Robert Scott and his wife. Scott was keeper of the new Ely House of Correction, just beside the Bishop's prison in Gaol Street. The original building had dated back to the mid 1600s. It had housed both men and women in small cramped cells with a strong room that had 34 iron bars across the floor to keep inmates secure. There had been no exercise space, no apothecary, no chaplain and no religious presence. Inmates spent the day on hard labour, beating hemp to enable the fibres to be made into rope. At night they slept on straw mattresses on wooden bedsteads or rented a better bed from the gaoler for threepence a night. But in recent years things had changed

In 1820 an Act of Parliament had been passed authorising the construction of a new sessions house and house of correction at both Ely and Wisbech. The present building was designed for thirty-two prisoners in separate cells with four yards and six day-rooms. It was clean, well

ventilated, and warmed by stoves in severe weather. The prisoners had iron bedsteads and proper bedding. Each room had a bible and the chaplain visited regularly. It was just too soft, some claimed. Baber learned different when he visited Samuel Coy during the nine weeks he was locked up there before he even came to trial. He did not like the experience at all.

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Ely's newly rebuilt House of Correction stood alongside the Bishop's Gaol but was separate from it. It was intended for debtors owing sums of less than forty shillings who'd been sentenced to imprisonment for 20 or 40 days – though all too often they'd owed less than three shillings before all the expenses of the judicial process had been added on. They were brought in from distances of some fifteen miles, jolting along the fenland roads in open carts and subjected to stares – many of pity – from people they had passed.

But given the lawlessness of the time the gaol also housed poachers, misbehaving servants, men accused of fathering bastards, women convicted of lewdness and various other minor offenders. Whether found guilty or not, all were herded together with no separation between tried and untried prisoners and debtors. Even though the gaol had only been opened in 1821 it was already far too small for the number of inmates it had to house – it would another ten cells to bring it up to Government standards.

The Keeper, Robert Scott, just couldn't keep order and the prisoners had not the slightest respect for him. There was no discipline, the chaplain never visited, the surgeon came only irregularly and the only other official was his wife who kept watch over the female prisoners. There was no prison clothing although when prisoners came in almost naked and with no shoes to their feet Scott had to find something to cover them, buying second-hand clothes for the purpose. There was no water to wash, no soap or towels and the privies smelt abominably – and this at a time when cholera was raging in the streets of Ely, just the other side of the prison wall.

There was no work for the inmates to do except picking oakum but there was so little demand that it produced scarcely any income. The magistrates had installed a treadmill but there was nobody to oversee it so it stood idle. Prisoners passed their time in boredom. That meant Samuel Coy from Stretham had been kept cooped up in the nine by six-foot cell he shared with five other prisoners. One was a debtor, two were housebreakers and two accused of stealing linen. These were uncontrollable, cursing and swearing continually, boasting of the robberies they had committed, making use of the most horrid language and singing obscene songs. What was worse he had to share a bed – two men to each.

But it could be worse: one vagrant was closely confined to a day-room by himself without fire or bedding and only loose straw on the paved floor. The glazed window had been removed which made the room even colder but was in one way beneficial as his pail had remained emptied for two days. Scott claimed it was because he was incorrigible.

Samuel Coy had found the prison food most unpalatable – just half a quartern loaf of bread – though many inmates bartered or sold the cold meat, cheese, vegetables, tea, coffee, tobacco and beer which their friends were allowed to bring in. It was the worse thing he had ever experienced: he had nine children and he would rather see his son dead than be committed to such a place.

He had been tempted to get away, but was still an innocent man awaiting his trial. It would have been simple to do. One chap had tried it by throwing his blankets over the wall, another by sawing the iron bars of the window while five had managed a mass escape by breaking a hole through the day-room with the bucket iron of the pump. But there was an even easier

way. Each Sunday the prisoners were led across the yard to the chapel at the rear of the Sessions House. There were 35 of them and just one officer so Daniel Archer, who'd been charged with stealing watches from the shop of Mr. Jeremiah Giscard, of Ely, took his chance. As the prisoners were being lead back to the cells he turned into the coal-cellar of the Keeper's house. After the other prisoners had been locked up, Scott had gone to breakfast without counting them. It was only on his return about two hours later that he'd discovered Archer wasn't there. A wild goose chase was immediately commenced around Ely, but to no purpose. It reflected badly on the gaoler who'd been warned that Archer was a desperate and dexterous character.

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It was not just Robert Scott, keeper of the Ely House of Correction, who was having difficulties with Isle of Ely prisoners.

They were also causing problems at the County Gaol in Castle Street, Cambridge. There two were being kept in chains after breaking out of the day-yard whilst others were thought to be plotting an attack on the turnkey. The gaol was unusually full of commitments from the Isle together with a great increase in numbers of debtors generally, swelled by numerous old soldiers

With so many inmates the filthy state of the prison drains had been causing concern: they'd overflowed with the contents of the privies running down Castle Hill before coming to a halt in a stinking pool near the Ely turnpike road. It was remedied by sinking a large cess-pool close to the outer side of the northern wall. But this had eaten into the governor's budget

But prison did not seem to be doing any good. Of the 429 in custody at Cambridge over a quarter had been in prison before, 63 once, 28 twice, 15 thrice and over 23 of them even more times than that. Most of them had committed their crime whilst drunk

Many were mere lads – 90 were under the age of 21, of whom 13 were under the age of 14 years. This was a concern for the prison chaplain who examined, admonished and instructed them. He discovered that on arrival half could not repeat the Lord's Prayer and just 20 knew the Ten Commandments, though most said they went to church every Sunday. As for reading they were equally divided: 130 of them could manage simple sections of the Bible but 130 could not read at all. Just 50 could write and most of those could only manage their own name. Of the 273 prisoners 166 were single, 107 married with over 260 children dependent on them.

Not all finished their sentences: William Mair, who'd been committed for burglary at Ely, had died in gaol, despite being nursed by his wife. There was some concern that the prison food had contributed to his demise. The prison surgeon had been concerned not to give inmates better food than that they would have had at home. But of course in gaol they were working far harder on the tread-mill than they were used to and soon went down sick.

So he'd experimenting with a new diet giving a pound and a half of best bread, two pounds of potatoes and a quart of gruel, with salt, daily together with an extra allowance of half a pound of cheese weekly to those prisoners who had been on the tread-mill for three months. At this most of the prisoners in number two yard had struck work, demanding the potato ration should be doubled. They'd been confined in the solitary cells and kept on bread and water for three days – extended to seven by visiting justices.

But other prisoners claimed that the potatoes made them ill, one man said the cheese disagreed with him and they all petitioned to go back to the old menu of bread and gruel. Now it had settled down with the treat of a pint of vegetable soup in place of the potatoes on

Tuesdays and Fridays. But when onions became too expensive to add to the broth they were discontinued and prisoners became sick once more. Since then their health had improved with just the occasional complain of ear, back or leg ache.

There were other changes which were causing concern. The Government had decided that convicts awaiting transportation who became sick should be transferred back to the gaol that they had started in. This meant that Abraham Singleton, aged 26 years, who'd been sentenced to transportation for life would now be an inmate of the Cambridge gaol for the rest of his days, being supported at the cost of the county funds. Likewise William Butler who'd been acquitted on the grounds of insanity would also become a virtually permanent resident, a great impediment to prison discipline. Justices thought he should be discharged back to his original parish – and thus be a burden on them instead

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While the keeper of the Ely House of Correction ensured that the debtors and prisoners remained secure, their spiritual welfare was the concern of the prison chaplain who combined the role with that of curate of Chettisham and was paid £40 a year for his duties.

He kept a journal, though he had not much to report: he supplied religious books and tracts, though these were soon mutilated and soiled, and paid an occasion visit to the younger prisoners if he thought he could do any good. He also turned up on Sunday to perform one full service, though he always felt worried whilst ministering in a chapel full of up to 35 men delighted to be out of their cells for a brief time. Not that he could complain of any levity whilst they were supposed to be listening to him, it was the thought of what might happen should they decide to take matters into their own hand while he was preaching: there were no divisions within the chapel and it was very insecure.

Next door at the Bishop's Gaol the chaplain, Rev John Griffith was even closer to his prisoner-flock, for he preached his Sunday sermon in the Keeper's parlour, a room about eleven foot square into which crowded as many as thirty inmates. At times services had to be cancelled, as in December 1834 when the prison was in a state of insurrection.

But Griffith had other duties too, some of them traumatic. One incident he recalled had taken place in April 1827 after three men, two of them brothers, had been sentenced to hang for the rape of a 60-year old mother of eight children at March. Two others had been found guilty of holding the poor woman down. The judge had warned the men that their time on earth was very short and they'd been removed from the dock to the sound of agonised cries from their wives and relations.

Griffith had visited them after they'd been taken back to the Bishop's Gaol to await their fate, only to find they did not want his ministry. They were not members of the Church of England, but Wesleyans. So he'd arranged for Rev James Bate from the chapel in Kate's Lane to provide spiritual comfort instead.

As the day for their execution neared, friends and family had called to say their final farewells. Then on the Monday, two days before they were due to hang, the gaoler had called them together with the news that the three had been reprieved. They would be taken to the hulks before being transported for their rest of their lives. The men fell on their knees and gave thanks to God for the mercy that had been granted them.

But for another man, Joseph Kitchen, there was no hope. He'd only been convicted of assisting in the assault but the next day he'd faced trial again, this time accused of raping the

woman before the others had their turn. Arguments that a man should not be tried twice for the same offence had been dismissed by the judge.

Despite his revulsion for the offence, Griffith had tried to encourage him to seek divine forgiveness, even if earthy pardon was impossible. At first when he'd called to administer the sacrament Kitchen had been firm and collected. But then he'd broken down and made a full confession. The chaplain had written down his words: 'My only dependence for the salvation of my immortal soul is in the merits of a crucified Saviour. I have steadfast hope that he will receive my soul into paradise. I hope that all my old companions, and those who may witness my last end, will take warning, and shun vice and bad company. I have not only broken the laws of my country, but have been a great sinner against God. Sabbath breaking, drinking, cock-fighting, and bad company, have been the frequent practice of my past life, and have led to the crimes for which I justly suffer the penalty of the law. I hereby acknowledge I committed the rape by force and against the will of Ann Stamford.' The statement was witnessed by James Bate and Zachariah Artis, another Wesleyan minister.

Next day Reverend Griffith had been with Kitchen as he was taken to the gallows, praying as they went. He'd followed him up onto the platform, knelt and prayed with him for one final time, shook hands and left him to his fate. It was then he first became aware of the crowd of some ten thousand people who'd come to watch. Together they witnessed the executioner perform his duties before the bolt was drawn and the unhappy wretch launched into eternity. After hanging the usual time, the body was cut down and delivered to his family who had then made arrangements for its burial. John Griffith had been amongst the mourners.

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Ely's Welseyan Methodists had followed the trial of one of their flock with some interest and prayed for Joseph Kitchen when he'd been hanged for rape in 1827. The memory of the Methodist minister from nearby Little Downham who'd experienced a similar fate in 1810 after he'd attempted to poison his wife's family to gain an inheritance was also never far from their mind.

Then their Circuit Secretary had been arrested in Ely. In June 1821 the Rev Thomas Heywood had stood on a large stone at the Woolpack corner, a hundred yards from the Market Place where a pleasure fair was in progress. There he started to preach the gospel. He soon attracted a considerable group who seemed to be listening attentively to what he had to tell them. But then the law intervened, as he related. "As I was praying, Mr Bacon, the constable, came up and interrupted me and commanded me to leave off. I asked him what authority he had to interrupt me. He showed me his staff. I told him as I wished him well, I would advise him not to interrupt me without a warrant from a magistrate, for if he did, he would bring himself into trouble. He then left me.

"When I had almost finished my sermon, he came again saying he had orders to take me. I wished him to wait till I had finished my discourse, and with apparent reluctance he did. I said I would not go without a warrant unless he took me by force. He laid hold of my coat and dragged me with such violence I thought he would have torn it to pieces. I believe he did tear it, for I found it torn afterwards, and I do not know it was torn before. I said to the people 'You are witnesses that he is taking me by force'. They said 'We are witnesses'.

"He brought me before the magistrate, Sir Henry Bate Dudley, who asked me by what authority I had been acting as I had. I said by the authority of the Methodist Conference, that I was a Methodist Itinerant preacher. He said, 'You shall not come here to cause a tumult, especially on such a day as this'. I said, 'I have not caused any tumult, nor has there been any tumult, nor did I design to cause any. I see sinners go on in sin and I feel for them, and wish to be instrumental in doing them some I good.' He said. 'You shall not do them good that way.

Where do you live?' I replied I lived at Chatteris. , 'Well, I will give you your choice, you shall either go to prison or leave Ely immediately.' I said, 'I am appointed to preach in the Methodist Chapel tomorrow morning. I shall leave Ely after I have preached'. 'I have nothing to do with the Methodist Chapel,' said he, I suppose it is licensed according to law. Will you not go to yonder place again to cause a tumult?' I said, 'I am now going to a friend's house and after I have preached in the Methodist Chapel tomorrow morning, I shall leave Ely,' 'Well', said he, 'If you cause any more tumults, I will put you in prison.' He then let me go".

Worried, Heywood had written to Jabez Bunting, the Secretary of the Wesleyan Methodist Conference, to seek advice. He was told not to preach in the street in Ely but try it elsewhere where there might be less opposition. It would certainly not do to cross Sir Henry Bate Dudley, the fighting parson who'd smashed the Littleport riot.

One place to avoid – if history was any guide – was Lode. There on 24th March 1761 upward of 300 persons had assembled in a Laurence Cooke's barn to hear Bourn, a Methodist preacher, previously a shepherd. About nine o'clock in the evening somebody called 'Fire'. The hurry and confusion was so great that many were trampled under foot till they lay near six foot deep one upon the other. Great numbers were hurt and bruised, others carried out of the barn and left for dead – though they recovered some time afterwards. The men lost hats, wigs and shoes, the women their short cloaks, part of their gowns, pockets, stockings, and shoes. The cause of the catastrophe was a person on the outside of the barn who broke a hole in the clay wall behind the preacher, through which he put a pipe, filled with tobacco which he puffed and puffed until someone spotted the smoke and caused the panic.

At Ely congregations increased until their chapel became too small to hold those wishing to attend. So they erected a larger gallery which was opened by Jabez Bunting in 1824. In other parts of the country congregations were struggling to remain solvent and the Ely Wesleyans decided to sell off a large portion of the site on which the chapel stood so that the money could be used elsewhere.

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Whilst the Methodist congregation at Ely was flourishing the movement was finding it more difficult to obtain recognition elsewhere. In Tempsford, near St Neots, it came about in a most unlikely manner.

The village was dominated by Sir Gillies Payne who had built himself a grand new hall with the money made from the West Indian slave trade. He was not a man to trifle having almost prompted an international incident after a few slaves he had been sent to Flat Island had been driven off by the French. He had complained to Lieutenant Governor Nugent who threatened to send troops and ships to sort matters out. Generally Sir Gillies had a fair reputation and was sufficiently concerned for the wellbeing of the Negro workers on his plantations that he allowed Methodist Missionaries to give them religious instruction.

Such teaching had not been imparted to his daughter, Catherine. She'd married George Sharpe on the island of St Vincent, where she lived for ten years. During that time she had never read the Bible or gone to church but once. She had however raised a large family. Then her husband decided to bring the children back to England for their education. He went on board a ship lying in the harbour of Grenada to examine the accommodation and was attacked by an infectious fever which had raged in the vessel during its previous passage. Within in a very few days George died, leaving his disconsolate widow and five children to pursue their

voyage alone. On their arrival in England they were welcomed by her father at Tempsford Hall.

Catharine tried to settle into English country life and customs. She became popular, often receiving a dozen of the 'Siblett Cakes' made of dough, sweetened and flavoured with caraway seeds, that were distributed by farmers' wives after wheat-sowing. Her children enjoyed riding with the family's coachman, Samuel Bennett.

Bennett was a Baptist who regularly journeyed twenty miles on the Lord's Day to join in divine worship with a congregation of his own communion. One day on his travels he met with a Methodist preacher, the Rev Thomas Linay, and before the journey reached its end he invited him to come and preach in Tempsford next time he was passing. Samuel approached Sir Gillies for permission to hold a meeting in his own home, but was refused: "Those Methodists will certainly ruin you, Mr Bennett, as sure as you are a man". "Oh no sir", Bennett had replied, "they will do me no harm but much good, and they will do the whole village good too". At this His Lordship had a change of heart, agreeing that one of his cottages could be used as a place of worship. There a small congregation flourished until Sir Gillies died. Then things changed

One Sunday his daughter Mrs. Sharpe and another lady were passing the cottage when she was attracted by the sound of singing, it reminding her of sunnier climes and happier times. Entering, she discovered a service in progress whose members offered a prayer for their honourable visitor. One prayer led to another and by the time the meeting ended she was thoroughly converted.

Catherine repeated her visit to the place, however uninviting its exterior appearance, to the horror of her brother, Sir John Payne, who had succeeded to the title and estates. He considered she had grossly degraded herself and the family by worshipping God with those who were so greatly her inferiors. She was a widow with a rising family, whose interests it devolved on herself to guard and promote, he reminded her. But despite opposition from family, friends and social acquaintances Catherine remained steadfast in her devotion to the cause of the religious cottagers. Nor did she worship alone: intent on promoting the salvation of her children she regularly took them with her. This had an unexpected immediate impact on her eldest daughter, Maria, who was then at school in London. Without any hesitation she renounced the amusements of the theatre and the fashionable evils of dancing, absolutely refusing an invitation to a fashionable ball on the following Sunday.

The Methodists not only brought her a new religion, they bought her a suitor, the Rev Calder, whose preaching on the subject of St Paul won her heart. They married and for thirteen years she embraced the peculiarities of an itinerant preacher's life as he was appointed to Circuits across the country. She died young at Margate in June 1825, leaving a family of four sons and two daughters to mourn her. Both Tempsford cottagers and gentry united in grief and a service was held in the Methodist chapel that had taken the place of the original estate cottage

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Methodism had arrived in Cambridge about 1805 when followers hired a room in 'The Brazen George' opposite Christ's College. This was the site of one of the original medieval student hostels and through its yard ran the King's Ditch, the putrid stench of which was all too apparent to those attending the meetings. Despite the pong the congregation thrived and soon outgrew the space. They raised money to buy a plot for a proper chapel in Regent Street, but then could not afford to build it. Instead they moved to Blucher Row, Fitzroy Street where William Beacock and others constructed a chapel in their own time, working evenings and weekends – always being sure to break for the Sunday service.

One chapel led to another: in 1819 they took over the old Independent Chapel in Green Street where John Stittle had previously attracted large congregations and feuded with undergraduates until they'd threatened to tip him and his sedan chair into the river – tales Pickwick had heard already. Now Wesleyans were planning celebrations to mark the centenary of their movement when people from around the country would be making their way to Cambridge.

But not all Methodists believed it was necessary to worship in churches, some preferring open-air ministry and camp meetings. A break-away movement, calling themselves 'Primitive Methodists', had been established and one of their travelling preachers, Joshua Reynolds tramped from its base in Staffordshire to spread their version of John Wesley's teaching. He reached Cambridge in August 1821.

He had told Elliot Smith of the hardships of his ministry: "I have been many times knocked down when preaching and have often had sore bones. Once I was knocked down and trampled under the feet of the crowd and had my clothes torn and all my money taken from me. In consequence I have been obliged to suffer much hunger. One day I travelled near 30 miles and had only a penny cake to each. I preached at night to near 2,000 persons. But I was so weak when I had done that I could scarcely stand. I then made my supper of cold cabbage and slept under a haystack in a field till about four o'clock in the morning when the singing of the birds then awakened me and I arose and went into the town and preached at five to many people".

By the time Reynolds got to Cambridge he was almost worn out with fatigue and hunger. He found a town with hundreds of ministers in it but little evangelistical preaching and thousands of its inhabitants living in iniquity. Compared to some places he'd been this was heaven: he suffered a little persecution (it was after all August so the undergraduates were not here) and he found the work worthwhile. Thousands flocked to hear his word and souls were converted every day. Whole families were saved: "I prayed in a house to which I had been invited and all the family, including three servants as well as near relatives found the Lord", he'd claimed. On Sunday he held a prayer meeting at Barnwell attracting 245 people and then moved on to Horningsea where people arrived in their cartloads. That afternoon he returned to Barnwell to find the place completely packed - rumours had been circulated that he was about to be arrested for his pains and dozens had come just to see him carted off to gaol. Many were disappointed when he was not, others found themselves swayed by his oratory. Then Reynolds headed off on the road again having fertilised the ground and sown the seed for a new chapel on Castle Hill.

But Cambridge had not finished with the Primitive preaching Reynolds for in January this year, 1838, an American widow of that name had followed in his footsteps. Joseph Romilly, Registrary of the University, had joined the congregation to see what the fuss was about. He found her a clever young woman but was somewhat critical of her strange pronunciation. He was far more scathing of her companion, a wild bellowing coarse fellow named Pratt who had invoked the Deity with disgusting familiarity, exhorting him to send down a shower of Grace and sprinkle them with the blood of the Lamb – at which the congregation had responded with repeated Amens. Nor did the Rev Romilly approve of the hymns – but then it was hardly likely he would have found such services to his taste!

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Pickwick had been seated with Elliott Smith in the Little Rose Coffee House for some time when they were joined by a young gentleman who was introduced as Henry Hayles Bond, physician at the nearby Addenbrooke's hospital.

Bond was feeling somewhat fraught: the hospital only had a staff of three physicians, three surgeons and a resident apothecary and now the Regius Professor of Psychic had been stricken down with paralysis following an attack of typhus. The number of beds had lately been increased from seventy-eight to one hundred with seven large and two small wards in the main building and another two nearby.

“Patients are supposed to be admitted only one day a week but in practice acute cases arrive at any time. About half of them come from the town of Cambridge, the others from the county around. “They have the usual range of complaints – many of them relating to constipation”.

The problem of indigestion was exacerbated, Bond felt, by overdosing with Epsom salts. “The practice of taking purgative medicine in every indisposition, slight or serious, previously to taking medical advice, has become the prevailing habit among the females of the labouring classes and domestic servants, and is almost regarded by them as one of the necessaries of life”.

“Another problem is insufficient or innutritious food”, Bond continued. “But here families of the poor resident in the town of Cambridge are differently circumstanced from those in the surrounding agricultural population. Cambridge folk can procure good animal food at a very reasonable rate and most frequently have a dinner of butcher's meat three times a week. You see when members of the University are in residence, large quantities of broken victuals, the perquisite of college servants, are sold at comparatively a very cheap rate”. All those half-eaten chickens and joints left by undergraduates quickly disappeared and, with a little judicious butchery, found their way to tables in many of the poorer areas of New Town or Barnwell.

However the village poor scarcely ever procured any animal food except bacon, and that but rarely, so as to furnish little more than one meal in the week. Bond had surveyed a typical countryman’s diet. A working family, consisting of man and wife with seven children, would typically consume three stone of flour, three pecks of potatoes, one-and-a-half pounds of cheese, one-and-a-half pounds of pork, half-pound of butter, one-and-a-half ounces of tea, and a pound of sugar. But a man and his wife with four children earning nine shillings was down to three pecks of brown bread, half-pound of butter, sugar and tea.

However the diet for poorer families - a man and his wife with one grand-child earning eight shillings - would be for breakfast a mess of water-gruel with bread for the husband while the wife a little tea with bread. Dinner is pork with potatoes and bread - no beer - and for the evening meal the husband has bread and cheese and the wife bread and butter with tea. The child has a mess with water out of the kettle - boiling water poured over bread, with sugar added and sometimes dripping given them by the farmer.

Bond felt that an almost total absence of animal food meant the agricultural population took longer to recover from any sickness and considered more money devoted to the cupboards of the poor would be better than providing medicine to combat the deficiency of their diet.

But sometimes country folk pined for their old food when in hospital. One patient had been confined to bed for months and was slowly recovering when he was seized with vomiting. Eventually he passed an oblong white concrete substance about three or four inches long and nearly an inch broad. On examination it proved to be a mass of cheese kneaded together by the motions of the stomach. Now cheese was not part of the hospital diet and it was found on enquiry that ten or twelve days previously he had eaten some cheese smuggled in by a friend!

Many patients got better but when they died in hospital it gave a welcome opportunity for post-mortem examinations when local practitioners would be invited to come and watch. As a

result the University had built up an extensive museum of organs which Pickwick was welcome to inspect – but this was one invitation he declined.

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Amongst the bottled specimens in the museum of human organs at Addenbrooke's Hospital were mementoes of many Cambridge men whose names were forgotten though their ailments were not. But there was one man who had aided medical science that would live on for as long as people told tales. And he was James, Jemmy, Gordon. People reminisced fondly of his wit and witticism but Henry Hayles Bond, physician, had a less charitable opinion than many.

“In the early part of his years Jemmy had been in the law and was a clever man, but his love for a fair maiden drove him to drink and he lost his position. As his father made him a handsome allowance, he used to give some very jovial entertainments at his own house but his extravagance knew no bounds, and he was, after a time, under the necessity of going into cheap and obscure lodgings since his means would not enable him to gratify his extraordinary fondness for wine and liquor. He was then at the service of any man who thought proper to send him an invitation to entertain his friends, and to get very drunk by way of recompense.

“A relation who knew him in his former good days left him ten shillings per week, to be paid him every Monday morning with the charitable intention of keeping him from starving. But the moment Mr. Jemmy got his ten shillings off he went to the Hoop Inn and had a bottle of claret, which liquidated his weekly allowance. He soon became so shabby and so dirty that no one would suffer him to enter his rooms. As he was not ashamed to beg, he applied to every person he met, and raised money in that way. Some gave because they believed him to be in distress, others because they were afraid of him - for if any person (no matter what his rank or position in Town or University might be) had been guilty of any indiscretion, Jemmy would be sure to proclaim it aloud whenever he met him.

Dressed in a huge cocked-hat and the tarnished uniform of a general or an admiral, (for Jemmy was not too proud to accept any article of apparel that was occasionally given to him from an old-clothes shop), and sporting a rusty old sword he was a well-known figure on Market Hill or Petty Cury. He was always, in sunny weather or snowy, far from sober, odorous of gin and beer. He could be heard from one end of the street to the other hallooing after or calling some one by some disgusting name, roaring out scraps of songs, or quoting fragments of poetry.

Gownsmen and others became so accustomed to his vile ways, that they did not often mind him. But to females, more particularly to strangers unacquainted with the wretch, he was an object of terror, and intimidation. I have known many when they heard his dread voice, for he had lungs of high pressure, go into the first house they were near to avoid him as they would a bull - perhaps the best animal of the two. For many years this extraordinary character infested the streets, swearing and blaspheming in the most horrible manner, the police not daring to interfere.

But Gordon was an arrant coward, for if any one held up a stick to him, with a fixed determination to punish him (and he had quite sense enough in all his mad and drunken tricks to discover that), he would make a low bow, and walk off. He had been in the habit of giving me the benefit of his tongue whenever he met me; at length I was determined to try whether a good caning would put a stop to it. In the midst of one of his abusive parts of speech to me I mustered up courage and tried the experiment, and did cane him. He walked off without attempting to return the compliment, and when he afterwards met me, he used for some time to pull off his hat, and say, "Bond, you are a gentleman; I do not care a straw for all the rest." This was all well for a time, but his abusive and threatening propensity with his stick prevailed, and one day he held up his stick in my face. I laid a complaint before a magistrate, who, glad of the opportunity, sentenced him to six months imprisonment. This was nothing to

Gordon*;* the wretched man was known many times to crave as a favour of the chief magistrate for the time being, a night's lodging in the House of Correction, being hopeless of obtaining elsewhere a roof to shelter him.

The instant he was released, and had begged a little money, he repeated his outrageous conduct which it was disgraceful to the magistracy to have so long tolerated. The fact was, that magistrates possessed, at least, a proportionate share of the failings of their fellow citizens, and were afraid that Jemmy (who was no respecter of persons) should proclaim their frailties in his loudest tones, from the Huntingdon turnpike to Addenbrooke's Hospital. It was therefore arranged between the magistrates and Jemmy, that he should leave Cambridge, never to return.

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The streets had seemed all too quiet once Jemmy Gordon had been put on a wagon to London where he was to be seen daily waiting the arrival or departure of the Cambridge coaches and continuing to earn a precarious subsistence by threatening to disclose details travellers might not want known. But soon even in London he became notorious; he had been discussed at a recent meeting of the Pickwick Club when one of its visiting members, Henry Pelham had regaled them with his experiences during a visit to a gin shop.

“Leaning against the counter at one corner was a man about the age of fifty, dressed in a costume of singular fashion, wearing a large cocked hat, set rather jauntily on one side, and a black coat, which bore a reminder of everything he had eaten and drunk for the last ten years. From his neck hung a blue riband on which was an eye-glass of block tin, and stuck under his right arm and shaped fearfully like a sword, peeped out the hilt of a very large and sturdy-looking stick.

“His features were in keeping with his garb: two small light-blue eyes shaded by bushy and imperious brows wore the dull, fixed stare of habitual intoxication. His nose was large, prominent, and aristocratic. It would have been ill-formed, had not some unknown cause pushed it a little nearer towards the left ear than the right. The lines in his countenance were marked as if in iron, giving him a remarkably sinister appearance which was accompanied by an arch leer about the month

“This was a man I though well worth getting to know. I offered him a pinch of snuff which he accepted with alacrity and a Latin phrase surely seldom heard in such a place. But his language changed when the bar tender refused to supply a him with a glass of gin – he’d demanded, ‘Your money, first, Mr. Gordon—you owe us seven-pence halfpenny already’ Now the fine classical phrases gave way to a low muttering of strange oaths, which rolled and grumbled, and rattled in his throat, like distant thunder. I offered Gordon half a sovereign at which his blunt blue eyes sharpened up in an instant. He seized the treasure promising to repay it at his earliest leisure and stuck out a marvellously dingy hand which I took in my own, just as soon as I’d put on my glove!

“After a glass or two he offered me a visit to his what he called his ‘club’, saying ‘We are a rare knot of as there—all choice spirits; some of them are a little uncouth, it is true, but we are not all born Chesterfields’. I followed him through the crowd at the door, which he elbowed on either side with the most aristocratic disdain, perfectly regardless of their jokes at his dress and manner. He no sooner got through the throng, than he stopped short and offered me his arm. But there was a certain odour in his garment which was possibly less displeasing to the wearer than to myself, so I pretended not to notice.

“He turned up a narrow street, and after passing some of the most ill-favoured alleys I ever had the happiness of beholding he stopped at a low door where he knocked twice. It was at

last opened by a slip-shod yawning wench, with red arms and a profusion of sandy hair. Gordon greeted her with a kiss and a promise of new customer. But first he said he must just step in and ask the gentlemen to admit me, adding it was merely a form—'for a word from me will be quite sufficient'. And so saying, he'd vanished for about five minutes. On his return, he informed me, with a cheerful countenance, that I was free of the house, but must pay a shilling as the customary fee. This took me aback, but it was now too late, so I inserted it in his waistcoat pocket and he led me up the passage into a small back room, where were sitting about seven or eight men, enveloped in smoke. With a very arrogant air, he proceeded to the head of the table, sat himself down with a swagger, and called out, like a lusty roysterer of the true kidney, for a pint of purl and a pipe. Not to be out of fashion, I ordered the same articles of luxury.

"After we had commenced a couple of puffs at our pipes, I looked round at our fellow guests; they seemed in a very poor state of body. Gordon told me something of their story – one was the son of an eminent coal merchant whose wife had run off with one of his customers, another an eminent cheat. He'd robbed his own father then got a job in a merchant's office where he'd risen to be head clerk and intended son-in-law. But three nights before his marriage, he broke open the till, and was turned out of doors the next morning. Since then he'd rogued himself out of a dozen fortunes, and a hundred friends, and managed with incredible dexterity and success, to cheat himself into beggary and a pot of beer."

All of this sounded very similar to the version of Jemmy's own life with which he'd amused his Cambridge acquaintances. But then the detailed changed.

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Jemmy Gordon, that notorious red-coated character who had terrorised respectable Cambridge folk with his ability to reveal flaws in their respectability, had been himself much speculated about. But few had ever got to know the real man. However Henry Pelham had got Jemmy talking in a dingy back room 'club' in London where he had let his guard slip in the presence of others as disreputable as himself.
"I was born gentleman, and educated with some pains; they told me I was a genius and it was not very hard to persuade me of the truth of the assertion. I wrote verses to a wonder—robbed orchards according to military tactics—never played at marbles without explaining to my competitors the theory of attraction—and was the best informed, most mischievous little rascal in the whole school", he'd recalled.

"My family were in great doubt what to do with so prodigious a wonder; one said the law, another the church, a third talked of diplomacy and a fourth assured my mother that if I could but be introduced at court, I should be Lord Chamberlain in a twelvemonth. While my friends were deliberating, I took the liberty of deciding: I enlisted, in a fit of loyal valour, in a marching regiment; my friends made the best of a bad job, and bought me an ensigncy. I recollect I read Plato the night before I went to battle; the next morning they told me I ran away. I am sure it was a malicious invention, for if I had, I should have recollected it; whereas I was in such a confusion that I cannot remember a single thing that happened in the whole course of that day.

"About six months afterward I found myself out of the army, and in jail; and no sooner had my relations released me from the latter predicament than I set off on my travels. At Dublin, I lost my heart to a rich widow (as I thought). I married her, and found her as poor as myself. God knows what would have become of me if I had not taken to drinking. My wife scorned to be outdone by me in any thing; she followed my example, and at the end of a year I followed her to the grave. Since then I have taken warning, and been scrupulously sober" (and here he seemed to wink) before calling, "Betty, my love, another pint of purl.

"I was now once more a freeman in the prime of my life; handsome, and with the strength and spirit of a young Hercules. Accordingly I dried my tears, turned marker by night at a gambling house and buck by day, in Bond-street, (for I had returned to London.) I remember well one morning, that his Majesty was pleased, en *passant,* to admire my buckskins—*tempora mutantur.* Well, sir, one night at a brawl in our *salon,* my nose met with a rude hint to move to the right. I went in a great panic to the surgeon who mended the matter, by moving it to the left. There, thank God! it has rested in quiet ever since. It is needless to tell you the nature of the quarrel in which this accident occurred; however, my friends thought it necessary to remove me from the situation I then held.

“I went once more to Ireland, and was introduced to ' a friend of freedom’. I was poor; that circumstance is quite enough to make a patriot. They sent me to Paris on a secret mission and when I returned, my friends were in prison. Being always of a free disposition, I did not envy them their situation: accordingly I returned to England. Halting at Liverpool with a most debilitated purse, I went into a silversmith's shop to brace it, and about six months afterwards. I found myself on a marine excursion to Botany Bay. On my return from that country, I resolved to turn my literary talents to account.

“I went to Cambridge, wrote declamations, and translated Virgil at so much a sheet. My relations (thanks to my letters, neither few nor far between) soon found me out; they allowed me (they do so still) half a guinea a week, and upon this and my declamations I manage to exist ever since, my chief residence has until recently been at Cambridge. I am a universal favourite with both graduates and undergraduates. I have reformed my life and my manners, and have become the quiet, orderly person you behold me. Age tames the fiercest of us. It is now vacation time, and I have come to town with the idea of holding lectures on the state of education. Mr. Pelham, your health. My story is done,—and I hope you will pay for the purl”

With that Pelham had taken an affectionate leave of Mr Jemmy Gordon and taken himself, laughing all the way, to a stand of hackney-coaches for the drive back to Piccadilly. He was aware he’d been taken for a fool, but aware too that the tale he could now relate would be one to be repeated time and again and embroidered in the telling.

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Jemmy Gordon did not enjoy his banishment to London, despite the easy pickings it offered. With his long slick and his cocked hat, his tattered Lucretius and his mighty eye-glass, he was regularly to be seen waiting the arrival or departure of the Cambridge coaches. Then one wet, cold November day he’d prevailed upon the driver of King’s Lynn Union coach, Thomas Cross, to allow him to ride outside and keep him company on what was otherwise destined to be a cold and lonely journey

En route Jemmy spun the usual tales – of how one day during an election for the University’s Members of Parliament he’d entered the crowded Senate House and joined Mr. Pitt, the Prime Minister and Cambridge candidate. “I was then handsomely dressed in my Windsor Livery, a Hue coat with red cuffs and collar and I congratulated the Premier upon the triumph he was about to obtain and added that my influence (which I hinted was pretty considerable) should be exerted in his support. We continued walking backwards and forwards, conversing for about half-an-hour and I could see that those who knew me were getting extremely indignant at my presumption, but no one liked to interfere.

“At length Beverley undertook to have me turned out, and walked up attended by two constables, for that purpose. I could see it would be vain to resist, so I made a hasty retreat. Mr. Pitt was all astonishment to see me - his new friend of whose loyalty and good sense he had formed a very favourable opinion - so unceremoniously treated. The crowd below the barrier hustled me out of the Senate House and Beverley, elated with his victory, followed.

He urged the persons assembled outside to take me off and dump me under the Conduit but he found as soon as he got away from the steps of the Senate House, that I had more friends than himself. I was immediately rescued, and if the constables had not interfered, Beverley would probably have undergone the punishment he would so willingly have inflicted on myself", Jemmy had recalled

Cross had enjoyed that particular journey – the time had seemed to fly. But the next time he'd seen Gordon he was a huddled bundle of rags begging a living on the Market Hill, offending and disgusting every one he met with. Jemmy's in-goings never equalled his out-goings, and many a parley had Jemmy with his empty purse. It was no uncommon thing for him to pass his vacations in *quod* for debts his creditors were well aware he could not pay. But they well knew also that his friends, the students, would be sure to *pay him out* on their return to college. For Jemmy this was no bad way of life, a little exercise on the treadmill left him fitter than usual, there were regular meals and he had a bed for the night.

Once released, and until he could get sent back again, Jemmy slept in the grove belonging to Jesus College, where he conveyed a bundle of straw which was but seldom changed. When winter set in he was allowed to sleep in the straw-chamber belonging to the Hoop Hotel. It was when ascending the ladder to his usual resting-place when he was very drunk, that he fell and broke his thigh. Next morning he was found to be incapable of moving, he was taken on a shutter to the hospital but was in so filthy a condition that he was refused admittance; he was then taken to St Edward's workhouse, where he died after several weeks of suffering

But the hospital had not seen the last of Jemmy. For at his death it was found that he had left a will, written at the Town Gaol on 31st August 1824. "I, James Gordon, being of sound and disposing mind, do hereby give and bequeath to Alexander Scott Abbott, Esq. Mayor of Cambridge, my body, after my decease, for dissection, or such other purposes as he shall think proper, upon condition that he gives me a coat, or suit of clothes which he has done with, hoping that the cast off carcass, will indemnify him for his cast off clothes".

Thus it was that Jemmy Gordon, for so long one of the characters that Cambridge undergraduates had mentioned in their letters home became the object of attention once more after his death. Students had inspected his fractures and contusions and marvelled at his liver – indeed it was still preserved somewhere amongst the specimens at Addenbrooke's Hospital

His likeness, in term time and out, was recorded by various engravers and sold as souvenirs in various shops. He was also proudly featured by Christopher Twigum in his poem on Cambridge in the Long vacation

The Picture Shops, a picture does display
Of Jemmy Gordon, when the Gown's away.
Jemmy who, to save from rustication,
Was wont to cram the dunce with declamation.
Although we are of Jemmy now bereft,
There are other *subjects* still in Cambridge left.

But surely few would be so worthy of a place in Pickwick's scrapbook!

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Henry Bond, physician at Addenbrooke's Hospital, was at the forefront of medical advances, but there were people out in the fens who were far more skilled than he. At Upwell there was one lady, Mrs Jerry, who was curing illnesses that defeated traditional medical practice. One person who sought her assistance was Mrs Ann English of Upwell who was herself widely

regarded as a woman who could treat almost any ailment. Ann could also break spells cast on cattle – she handed out some seeds to be burnt on the fire at midnight – and if you were bewitched she would use a pack of cards to show whether your tormentor was a man or woman, dark or fair.

Upwell had a tradition of witchcraft dating back to the 1600s. In those days the prime suspect was Ellen Garrison, and her tale was worth the telling. By 1646 Ellen had been regarded as a witch for 20 years, as her her mother had been before her.

Tales were told of how she'd approached Robert Parsons, a butcher, to buy a pig and left a deposit to seal the deal. But his wife Katherine did not approve so when Ellen returned with her daughter to collect the animal Robert refused to let them have it and offered to return the money. At this Ellen flew into a rage, banging the table and swearing he'd regret that decision.

Immediately things went wrong for the Parsons' household: within a couple of hours Kathleen felt a pricking and tearing at her skin, and soon she was tormented all over. She staggered from her house and banged on Ellen Garrison's door, apologising and offering her the pig for nothing. The witch came straight over and took it. But it was not the end. Within a few weeks four of their bullocks had died, then their two children – one seven years old, the other a baby – fell quiet and weak, their skin as pale as tallow. Robert and Kathleen Parsons watched helpless as their children's lives ebbed away.

Their grief grew into a fury and hope was at hand with the arrival of two witchfinders – men who travelled the country investigating such cases. One was Matthew Hopkins from Littleport, the other John Stearne. Once they'd heard the Parsons' story they sent a constable to arrest Ellen. Then two married women came forward to act as searchers. If the devil had left his marks on her body – as he did when he came to them to grant them their diabolical powers – then they would find them.

One of the searchers was Anne Morrice – although she herself had long been considered a witch. The other was Avis Savory who was a type of woman to stand up and be counted – 10 years earlier her husband had been arrested for having 'mutinously disturbed the drayning of the fens' and had only escaped punishment because he was so poor. The women had stripped Ellen and examined every inch of her body, every crease and crevice – and they found two little marks where nobody would ever see them. They were where her imps would come to feed! So now it was just a case of watching for the imps to come.

Matthew Hopkins, the witchfinder, told the watchers when to expect to see them. They focussed their attention as best they could by candlelight and the glow of a hearth. But when a creature did appear it took everyone by surprise. Avis saw 'a thing in likeness of a beetle come into the roome' and one of the watchers killed it. Then about an hour after a cricket came from the chimney. Having heard this Hopkins ordered a second body-search, this time led by Anne Clarke, a midwife from Outwell. Now there were three marks between Ellen's legs, and that they were swollen – it was definitely where some of the devil's imps had sucked her.

When it came to a trial various local people prepared to testify to her wickedness including Robert and Katherine Parsons who would at last avenge the death of their poor children. The watchers and searchers were ready with their evidence and the whole community was confident that years of tolerating this witch were at an end.

There were three women tried for witchcraft that day. Ann Green was indicted for employing evil spirits to cause harm, but she pleaded not guilty and was acquitted. Ann Disborough was also acquitted. That left Ellen. She was indicted for murdering the Parsons' children – but that

was thrown out on a technicality. Then she was acquitted on the other charge too. Once Ellen's husband had found the money to pay for her gaol fees, she was free to return home to Upwell, and to continue living alongside the men and women who'd accused her. It had been a most difficult for all involved.

All that was a long time ago, but today, in the first year of the reign of Queen Victoria there was something far more contentious happening in Upwell. And Ann English and Mrs Jerry were only minor players in the story.

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There were new medical advances being made by a number of medical men with Cambridge connections. One was John Elliotson who'd studied at Jesus College 1810-1821, a decade before Henry Bond. Whilst at Cambridge he'd established a reputation as a pioneer in various methods of treatment including the uses of opium in diabetes and the diagnosis of heart disease. He'd also been the first to bring the stethoscope to England.

Elliotson had then sought fame and fortune in London where he became physician to St Thomas's Hospital and lecturer at Grainger's school of anatomy. As his reputation grew he built up the largest private practice in the capital, the street being filled with a constant stream of his patients' carriages and his work was reported in the medical press.

But Bond, who'd followed him into the position of physician at Addenbrooke's Hospital, was one of those who were not impressed, feeling Elliotson was constantly seeking publicity. many deplored the way he'd abandoned the traditional garb of knee-breeches and stockings and even grown a beard. What was worse they considered he was too keen to experiment on his patients, frequently administering massive doses of powerful medicines, and was too quick to adopt new methods such as acupuncture, phrenology, and, most notoriously, mesmerism.

Franz Mesmer, a German physician and astrologist, had come up with the theory that there was some subtle magnetic fluid flowing through the human body which could sometimes get blocked, causing various ailments. If this could be unclogged all would be well. Initially he started by waving a magnetized pole over sufferers, which seemed to have some effect. Later he'd realised it made for a better show if he got the patient to sit in a bath of magnetized water and dressed up in brightly-coloured robes while he performed. He even set up Magnetic Institute where he had his patients do such things as to sit with their feet in a fountain of magnetized water while holding cables attached to magnetized trees.

Mesmer became very popular among the upper classes and members of the French court. He established special salons with dim lighting and soft music where he would move around the room using his hands to channel invisible magnetic fluids to his followers. The combination of light, music and incantations became known as "Mesmerism". But soon even the French began to be sceptical and King Louis XVI commissioned the Academy of Sciences to examine his claims of miraculous cures. The investigating committee included Benjamin Franklin and Dr. Joseph Guillotine, inventor of the machine that was to decapitate so many of his countrymen. They reported that there was no scientific evidence and that the cures attributed to it either happened because of the natural history of the disease or were due to self-delusion.

This did not deter Dr Elliotson. He began to mesmerize patients in his own wards at University College Hospital, London, claiming to achieve excellent cures. For a while his demonstrations attracted large audiences including celebrities and even royalty, the numbers forcing him to perform not in the wards, but in the hospital theatre.

His star patients were two teenage epileptics, the Okey sisters who apparently responded remarkably to his treatment. But then the editor of The Lancet, Thomas Wakley, claimed to have spotted deliberate trickery and strongly attacked Elliotson in his columns. This had led to a great controversy that was still raging, though it seemed probable that the hospital authorities would forbid the practice of mesmerism on the wards and even force Elliotson to resign.

However he had built up a large private fortune and a great reputation amongst his patients, so his future would be secure even it his reputation suffered. He had a wide range of friends including Charles Dickens, William Makepiece Thackeray and Chauncy Hare Townshend of

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Something strange had been happening in the fens as Addenbrooke's Hospital physician Henry Bond explained. Word had been coming back from various Wisbech doctors about the unorthodox treatments being carried out by William Tubbs who had recently moved from Parson Drove to the village of Upwell.

One of these involved Sarah Means, aged twelve. She was a pretty interesting little girl, daughter of a very industrious little farmer had been was seized suddenly with pain in the back part of the right shoulder, which caused her a restless night. The following day the pain extended down on the inner side of the arm to the elbow, and then to the wrist. Her shoulder increased in size while the arm seemed diminished. She could not sleep from the heat and tingling sensations she experienced while in bed, compelling her to sit up and support the arm. She always laid it out of bed to go to sleep; the only easy position was hanging the arm by her side

Her parents fearing their might be some dislocation had taken her to John Mason of Wisbech, a bonesetter, not a medical man. He'd rotated the arm three or four times and said it seemed all right – though Sarah complained of pain from his manipulations. He told her parents to apply leeches the arm and to return in nine days, which they did. He then said he could do no more.

So the parents took the girl to Dr Whitsed who ordered a repetition of the leeches together with poultices, lotions and medicine. By the time she went back a fortnight later her general health had deteriorated: the arm was much weaker, it had gone numb and she could not lift it.

After another month languishing at home the mother was urged to seek the advice of Mr Smith, of Diss in Norfolk, who attends every month at the Rose and Crown Inn, Wisbech and claimed to have a specific for scrofulous diseases. He recommended an embrocation to be applied twice a day and restoratives given internally – for which consultation he charged twenty-three shillings. The medicine lasted a month but there was no improvement to the arm and the parents gave up going to consult Mr Smith. By now they had given up hope.

Then they were told of the wonderful William Tubbs of Upwell who was supposed to be a 'Mesmerist'. Well the father would have nothing of such a quack treatment, so the mother decided not to tell him and took the girl anyway. By now she was in so much pain that she could not hold anything for long and was haggard from lack of sleep

Tubbs examined and measured the girl's arm then he did some sort of trickery and sent the girl into a trance, with her head resting on her chest. Whilst she slept he raised and lowered the arm, then left the room and treated other patients. Twenty minutes later he came back. The girl suddenly woke up and rubbed her eyes – using the arm that had been paralysed!

The mother took her back several times, each time Tubbs put her to sleep and before three weeks were out the girl was transformed; she was eating and sleeping normally and the arm was much stronger. She even started to go out to work, first pulling peas for Mr Goodman of Upwell and then reaping wheat.

This was not the only instance of his strange activity. William Flowerdy needed a painful operation on his face and Tubbs had decided to make a public spectacle of the event by inviting a number of onlookers from Chatteris. The lad had been quite unaware of what was to happen until Tubbs sent him into a trance. The Mr Culledge, a surgeon from March, started the procedure, only to be told to slow down so everybody could see what was happening. Then during the operation Tubbs irritated some of the exposed nerves, making the lad laugh, and even asked him if he felt any pain! Only then would he let the wound be stitched up. Nor was Flowerdy the only person to be used in this way: there were nine other people who were subjected to the same indignity on that occasion!

Walpole in Norfolk. He was contemporary of Bond's at Cambridge, a poet and hypochondriac who had also embraced the practice of mesmerism. But one of Elliotson's most dedicated followers was Dr William Tubbs, a surgeon based in the fenland village of Upwell.

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William Tubbs had started to practice his Mesmeric powers after tragedy had struck the household of Abraham Pearson, an Outwell shoemaker. Two of his children had died of scarlet fever overnight and he'd left his home at 5 o'clock a.m. on a June morning to go for his daughter, a distance of eight miles, to assist her mother in making mourning.

The poor man, who was dotingly fond of his children, had not slept during the previous night, and his grief prevented him from taking breakfast. On his return with his daughter, the day being exceedingly warm, he felt exhausted and had stopped at a public house, at Lott's Bridge where he drank off a pint of beer and immediately proceeded on his journey. When within three or four miles of his home, he suddenly fell down complaining of violent pain in his back. A cart was procured and two men had the greatest difficulty to keep him quiet. He was brought to Tubbs' surgery at about 5 o'clock p.m. in a state of delirium. His pulse was full and rapid, his breathing hurried, and he was unable to articulate or swallow. Tubbs was too busy with other patients to deal with him immediately but requested that he might be taken home, and promised to attend as soon as he could.

When he arrived at the house Tubbs noted: "On my entering his chamber, there were three men holding him in bed. His countenance was flushed; there was a general tremor of the body, a fixed eye, and still a bounding pulse. I requested that only one person (his son) might be present, took my place on the side of the bed, and commenced mesmerising the man by the thumbs. I had made but very few passes, when the patient suddenly fell backwards with his eyelids closed. I continued magnetizing him for a few minutes, and then left him. I called at about 11 o'clock a.m.: found him rational, and as cheerful as one could expect under the circumstances. The only uncomfortable feeling remaining was a stiffness in his neck and limbs, which I soon removed by transverse passes". Abraham had recovered enough to attend the funeral

Soon his techniques were being applied to other villagers: Widow Sharp went to the river for a pail of water and on raising the pail sprained her back. She complained of much pain down the left leg in the evening, and the following day was unable to leave her bed. Three days later she was no better when Tubbs visited. "My patient was perfectly ignorant of mesmerism. Standing behind her, I commenced operating by making passes down the spine; when she instantly called out, " Oh! what are you doing ?" I then made passes down the leg, when she

said the pain was then in the leg. Transverse passes were now made, and she said all pain was gone. She instantly got up, walked to the door, and a few hours after called upon several neighbours who had visited her in the morning. She is quite well, and has never felt any pain since".

As his reputation spread more people beat a path to his door. George Fisher a labourer living in a small alley in Outwell had suffered from rheumatism for the seven weeks, which he blamed on entering a newly-built cottage. He applied to Tubbs to be mesmerised. Tubbs had visitors at the time, but this did not deter him: "When he called, three gentlemen were taking their wine with me. I was leaving the room for the purpose of operating, when my friends urged me to allow the man to be mesmerised in their presence. The poor man soon made his appearance in the dining-room, moving slowly, bearing on two crutches, and his countenance manifesting much pain. I had never mesmerised him before, but immediately commenced in the presence of my friends, one of whom was a surgeon, and all three sceptics, by applying the ends of my thumbs to those of the patient, and looking steadily in his eyes. It was twenty minutes before he fell into the mesmeric state.

"I attracted his legs some distance from the ground, then by pointing to the pit of the stomach attracted him from his chair and he followed me round the room. I stepped backwards, and made a few darting movements towards my patient, and threw him backwards into one of the gentlemen's arms, and then again attracted him. I also stiffened the arms and legs at the wish of any present, and by blowing on the rigid limb instantly restored it to its natural state. My friends now being perfectly convinced of the reality of mesmerism, resumed their seats, while I allowed my patient to remain in the unconscious state. At the expiration of two hours, I demesmerised him. He got up, rubbed his eyes, and walked up and down the room without assistance. On the gentlemen present conversing with him, he was ignorant of what had passed. All that he remembered was that he came into the room with crutches, and that now he could walk without them. He left one crutch in my surgery, and the other he whirled in his hand in triumph on his way home. He has remained perfectly well ever since."

One of those present had been John Peck, the Parson Drove farmer Pickwick had met earlier. And if he was convinced, then who could doubt it was true.

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In the fens near Wisbech William Tubbs was professing to treat all sorts of ailments with his 'Mesmerism'. He was, curing lumbago, head aches, influenza, neuralgia and fits. And his treatments were being endorsed by leading members of the community.

George Waudby, master of Nordelph school had been first attacked with the rheumatic gout on the coast of Africa in 1821 and been afflicted by it ever since. He was compelled to go on crutches the whole of 1829 and part of 1830 and at other times had been obliged to have one, and sometimes both arms in a sling. But then Tubbs operated on him by mesmerising his right arm and in about half an hour he had complete relief. Since then Waudby had dined at the doctor's house and helped entertain the other guests who'd related how Tubbs had laid a magnet on the man's thigh which had prompted a violent muscular contraction while gold mesmerised and drawn over the limb had nearly the same effect.

Joseph Booth, landlord of the Swan Inn, Outwell was treated for acute rheumatism. Tubbs had mesmerised every limb and the man had walked without assistance. On another occasion he had been put into a strange sleep during which Booth had asked to see his groom, Ginger. Nothing would do but Ginger must come and see him. So a sleepy red-haired stupid-looking fellow (named Ginger from having neither whiskers nor beard) soon made his appearance. After conversing with him twenty minutes about his stock and other matters, he left the room. Later Booth had no recollection of Ginger talking with him, even after his groom assured

him: “Why, master, as sure as you are there I have been in the room before, and you said if I married Mrs. Chapman and did your work well, you would be a leg of mutton; and Mr. Tubbs said to me I must not take notice of what my master said, for he was light-headed: and so I thought, for you run on such stuff as I never heard before”. Tubbs had not told Ginger that his master had been mesmerised, saying the fever was raging so high that it affected his head.

Another convert was William Hodson, the Methodist minister who had established the colony in Manea Fen. He had been present when Tubbs had been called to bleed one of the residents, Mrs. Marreit. On arrival the basin, bandage and towel had been all laid out for the operation but finding her pulse only 74 and feeble, the tongue white and tremulous and the pupils dilated Tubbs had been reluctant to take blood. Instead he had put her into a sort of trance and then asked the woman to walk to a chair near the door. In rising she fell forwards and struck her nose violently against the bed-post but it did not wake her from the deep sleep. The treatment had worked for a while but then the symptoms returned and Tubbs had repeated the procedure on a number of occasions. To save the long journey across the fen from Upwell Tubbs had taught his skills to Hodson and he had treated her many times, even refining the art so as to be able to mesmerise the lady through a door without her knowing, He had send her to sleep even when she was in conversation with Mr. Raper, a farmer of Colne and then applied a piece of burning charcoal to her hand without any indication of pain.

Nor was Hodson his only disciple: Tubbs had also taught his housekeeper, Mrs Jerry to give treatments. Such unorthodox practices were causing alarm amongst other medical men, including Dr Culledge of March and Dr Whitsed of Wisbech who urged him to stop.

Instead Tubbs had conducted even stranger experiments. He had installed an electro-magnetic machine in his surgery and amused his friends by placing a silver shilling in water and telling them they might have it if they could get it while the machine was operated. Not one could seize the shilling, nor free the hand from the basin. Then Tubbs thought he would see if a mesmeric subject could do so. He put a young woman who was to have her leg amputated into the mesmeric state, and made her walk to the table. Seizing one wire, he said, “Margaret, I want you to take a shilling out of the water in this basin, and if you do so I shall give it to you”. She put her left hand in with care but suffered the same reaction as all the others and could not take it out. However Tubbs had a thought: he wondered if breathing on the hand while under a powerful magnetic machine would relax it. To his great surprise it did so, and she was able to seize the shilling and take it home with her. Tubbs had reported the phenomenon in one of the medical journals, causing yet more controversy amongst the doctors at Addenbrooke's Hospital, Cambridge.

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Henry Bond, physician of Addenbrooke's Hospital, was in full flow: it was part of the Hospital’s role to train surgeons but they had problems obtaining corpses for students to practice on. However a Norwich vet had found a novel way: he’d bought a body on weekly instalments while the man was still living – or so he’d claimed at his trial.

James Maxey had been an occasional servant to George Perowne, a veterinary surgeon, for some years before his death in June 1838. So it was appropriate that next day Perowne paid his respects to the widow at her house. He came with a generous offer: he would pay for the funeral, rather than have her husband buried by the workhouse in a pauper’s grave.

Mary was pleased to accept so a carpenter was immediately sent for to measure the body for a coffin. It was brought to the home on the same day and James was dressed in a shroud and laid in it.

But afterwards, when Mary was absent from home, the vet came calling again. Discovering that nobody was in the cottage, he put a boy in through the window to see if the body was still in the coffin. Finding that it was, he put a padlock upon the door and came back at night with his horse and gig when he took the corpse away to his own premises.

When Mary returned she was devastated and made her way to the vet's home, demanding to see her husband. Perowne was very reluctant to let her in, but she would not be denied. She quickly realised something was badly wrong: the corpse was cut and mangled, the heart had been taken out and it had been mutilated in a manner not to be described.

Perowne agreed to have it buried and the bearers were sent for. But before it was interred Mary asked to see it one last time. Perowne prevaricated, saying the body was in too putrid a state to be seen, but she insisted upon it. The coffin was returned to the vet's surgery but he would not let the mourners remain on his premises, taking up his gun and driving them all out of the yard. He then went inside and the parties heard him beating the coffin with a hammer and then they heard the rattling of stones. After two hours the mourners were finally admitted, when Mary found the body in the shroud. It was taken to All Saint's Church and the magistrates notified.

The magistrates sent for Mr Perowne, but the policeman returned alone and informed them that he was very drunk and had told them they might all go to h—l. A warrant was issued for his apprehension. On being brought up he said – as well as a man so drunk could say – that the body, coffin and shroud were his property; he had bought the body of the man while living, by paying him 2s 6d a week for a long time. He had bought the coffin for 18 shillings and had paid 17 shillings for breaking up the ground to bury him.

He had raised the money to bury him decently by subscription from his friends and produced a list detailing the payments he'd received. It was this claim that proved his downfall. The magistrates decided that he had obtained the money under false pretences, not intending to bury the body at all. But Perowne was still too drunk to understand anything and was remanded in gaol until he'd sobered up.

Next day the court once more reconvened. The vet insisted he had bought the body and that as he was a member of St Bartholomew's Hospital he had cut it up for the purpose of science. But the magistrates reminded him that although he might be a very clever man, if he would keep himself sober, yet he was not in any practice that required knowledge of the anatomy of a human being and his premises were not licensed for anatomical studies. They gave directions for the corpse to be interred so James Maxey got the Christian burial that had been promised.

Meanwhile local people related how this had not been the first time Perowne had been in court: he'd been tried a few years earlier for the murder of his wife and daughter by putting arsenic into their tea-kettle, but had been acquitted.

[Source: Times 7 Aug 1838, Cambridge Chronicle 28 July 1838 p4]

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If the medical profession was concerned about the activities of the Upwell Mesmerist and the Norfolk body-buying vet, others had problems nearer Cambridge.

Pickwick half-recognised the weather-beaten figure who joined Elliot Smith and himself at the table in the Little Rose. It was the man who had driven the coach which had brought him to Cambridge. His name, he recalled, was Thomas Cross. And he had a complaint about the medical treatment he'd received from a Cambridge coal merchant. He told the story.

Thomas had a house in Regent Street where he lived with his second wife and a family of seven children. When four of them were afflicted with ringworm he'd consulted William Donagan, the hairdresser in Rose Crescent, who'd treated them at a charge of a guinea each child. Now that was a lot of money for a stagecoach driver with a large family to find.

So when the fifth child showed similar symptoms he'd mentioned it to one of his passengers, a coal merchant named Shardelow who lived in Gold Street, the newly-developed area off East Road. He'd immediately replied 'A guinea, why I will undertake to do it for half that sum'.

Now everybody knew ringworm was a difficult condition to cure, even the doctors at Addenbrooke's Hospital had difficulties. New remedies were always being tried: one was to cut off the hair and coat the head with a solution of quicksilver, while a Brighton doctor had recently attracted attention for a new special solution of acid. So how was a coal merchant going to do a better job?

Shardelow had gone backwards and forwards Cross's home several times to see the child and occasionally taken the lad to his own house to dress the head with ointment. But instead of curing the condition it made it worse and in a short time the boy had been afflicted by fever. It took a very long time before he was cured.

Then the coalman had submitted his bill – for a massive two guineas. Cross had refused to pay, offering ten shillings to reimburse him for the medicines, but withholding the last promised sixpence. The matter had ended up in court where Shardelow had contended that he had done what was requisite in so bad a case and that when the fever came on he found that the disease on the head was getting better and had discontinued the ointment. The jury had believed him. Thomas Cross had been forced to pay over two guineas – four times the originally agreed sum and twice he'd have paid to the hairdresser.

But that seemed typical of the way things were going at the moment, Cross lamented. He'd not got on well in Cambridge since the very first time he'd made the journey down on the Union coach from London. He'd been a substitute driver and had never made the trip before but the horses knew the route well and he'd arrived at The Bull on Trumpington Street without incident where he handed the coach to the next driver who would take it the rest of the way to King's Lynn.

His spirits were raised when he recognised a friend, Monops, who had driven the Fakenham coach down the night before and who invited him to dine at his lodgings on boiled fowl and bacon. It was an invitation not to be spurned. Cross had made his way to the room traditionally used by the Union's coachmen in one of the numerous alleyways just off the market place where he performed his toilet using water from an ancient pump. Then, refreshed, he set off for his meal. He described what happened next

"I was walking along when, about twenty or thirty yards from the door, splash came a whole basin of water, something like breakfast slops, in my face, running down my neck, completely saturating my cravat, and otherwise moistening and discolouring my shirt and waistcoat. Remonstrance was vain, and only elicited an apology from the Hebe, who, with a slattern's gait and uncombed locks, had been the authoress of my discomfiture. She alleged, as an excuse, that having no back premises, people were compelled, like the inhabitants of the sweet-savoured Northern capital, to throw every-thing into the street."

It was not an auspicious start.

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When Thomas Cross was offered the position of driver on the London-Cambridge-King's Lynn Union stagecoach he'd been assured it would be a lucrative post – when the coach had first started the proprietor had appointed a man out of Newgate (the debtors' side) to drive it, and before he had been on it six months he was buying his port by the pipe.

But the King's Lynn route was not one of the most favoured on the road. Its main income came from carrying Lynn shrimps, much in favour with the Londoners, whose smell advertised the arrival of the stage almost before the sound of the horses' hooves. Even the down coach, hung round with empty baskets on a sultry day, would emit an effluvium that was very uninviting to the gentry, who in consequence would rather choose some circuitous route than thus have their olfactory organs offended.

Nor was The Union known as a Cambridge coach or if known, known only to be avoided. If a gownsman did travel it was by accident or necessity, not from choice. There was another reason: undergraduates preferred to travel with disreputable coachmen who would be more amenable to letting them drive – to the alarm of other passengers.

Such practice was common, as Cross knew from personal experience. A group of wealthy Ely yeomen had decided to start a rival coach which they named 'The Red Rover', mainly so they could have the fun of driving it. They soon found this was not as easy as they thought. One night the coach nearly overturned as it was travelling through Milton. When the driver investigated he found they'd run over a drunken man who'd been lying in the middle of the road and had crushed both his legs. They had to take him to Addenbrooke's Hospital, which ruined their timekeeping that night.

On another evening Bob Walker, one of the other Union coachmen, was driving his own drag when he met the Rover coming along the narrow winding bank between Brandon Creek and Littleport. The road was wide enough, but the coach was at that time being driven by William Read, a Stretham farmer who had adventured some of his capital in the venture. Being a very bad driver he suffered his leaders to swerve and, finding himself almost forced off the road, Bob doubled up his thong and fetched the farmer such a wipe over the face on passing as to leave the marks of a very sore impression.

Cross related what happened next: "Two or three days after this, my friend Bob had occasion to go to London. He sat on the roof behind me, the box-seat being occupied, and a letter was put into his hand as we were about to start. When we got out of the town, he handed it over to me. It proved to be a letter from one of the lowest of the members of the legal profession, intimating that if an apology for the assault on Mr. William Read was not immediately published in the Cambridge papers, an action would be commenced; the same time demanding 6s. 8d. for the letter.

"I asked him 'What do you mean to do with it?' 'Light this cigar with it', said he. 'No, don't do that. Allow me to answer it, will you?' He readily assented; when, on my return to Cambridge, I wrote and despatched the following little jeu d'esprit :

Oh! Billy Billy
Why so silly
As to take the Law on Bob,
Because his crop
He chose to drop
Upon your empty nob.

You could not think

That Bob would wink
At such an awkward Jarvie
Who meant to pitch
Him in the ditch,
So did it just to sarve ye

“The action was tried at Cambridge assizes in August 1833 and so confident was Read of obtaining a verdict that should cost poor Bob one half of the value of his coach and horses that he ordered a grand dinner at one of the principal Inns, at which all who were in any way connected with the "Rover," male or female, were invited, that they might chuckle over their assumed victory. But the judge ruled that not being the appointed coachman, Read had no right to drive and thus Bob had no case to answer.

“I composed a song to celebrate the occasion which gave employment to the ballad singers of the town for the remainder of the assize, and a week or two after, and the lyric was not forgotten on the road till the ‘Red Rover’ had ceased to run”.

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The stagecoach business was a precarious one financially, Thomas Cross explained.
The Union’s King’s Lynn proprietor, was Reverend James Arrow, a strange specimen. Nature had cheated him of his fair proportion and had sent him into the world with one hand deformed, which in some measure accounts for his having been brought up for the ministry, as that deformity incapacitated him for being a mechanic. But it did not prevent his trying his hand at driving four horses, which he now and then attempted till one evening, turning a sharp corner in the village of Denver, his infirmity caused him to blunder: an overturn was the result, which put an end to his advancement in that branch of the arts.

No one would have taken him for a minister of the Gospel, either from his dress, his manners, his conversation, or his habits; indeed, away from the scene of his ministration he would have passed for anything but a meek and lowly successor of the Apostles. Nevertheless he was such, of the sect called Independents. One day, being at Lynn, I took an opportunity of witnessing his performance in the pulpit, when neither his doctrine nor his devotion struck me to be of that character which was likely to attract many followers. But he some little celebrity as an orator as well as a little surplus cash which he had chosen to invest in coaching, this particular branch of business being at that time at a discount in Lynn.

Some few weeks after I started this he fell into pecuniary difficulties and the proprietors were informed the coach and horses were likely to be seized at Lynn by one of his principal creditors. Upon this I was sent down to make what arrangement I thought best to prevent the inconvenience that must arise from a stoppage, and to place the concern on some more sure and solid foundation by seeking out some one of the respectable inn-keepers in the town to become the Lynn proprietor.

This creditor was waiting the arrival of the coach from London, everyone seemed to stand in the greatest awe of him, he being one of the principal merchants in the town, and the officer by his direction took possession of both coach and horses. I expostulating with him on so hasty a proceeding, he demanded to know who I was that I should dare to interfere. I told him that I was there to represent the Lynn and London Coach Company, and denied his right, whatever his claim might be, to put them to a loss, and the public to a great inconvenience.

The officer then produced his warrant. I cried, ‘Take the horses with their harness, but touch the coach at your peril’. There were a number of people present, most of them wondering at

my impudence at thus setting their great man at defiance. ‘And why not the coach, Sir?’ asked the gentleman. ‘If you will walk into the office I will tell you, Sir,’ I replied.

All this altercation had taken place in the Inn yard, and I thought the office the most proper place to discuss a question of such moment. The doors being closed, I said ‘I do not, Sir, for a moment doubt the validity or the legality of your instrument as far as it goes; but it is my duty to tell you that the coach is not the property of your debtor to make over, nor of any one of the proprietors: it is the sole property of the coachmaker, of whom the company hire it, and pay for it by the mile. You will, therefore, find you are exceeding the power your document gives you, if you persist in taking the coach with the horses’.

I submitted that it would be much better for him and the Company, as well as the public, to allow the coach with the horses to continue their work. It was customary in the business for any one proprietor wishing to take his horses off, to give a month's notice, thereby giving time to find some one to cover the ground. I assured him that his security would not at all be damaged or diminished by so doing; and said if he thought there would be any danger in the horses being out of sight of the officer, he could send a man to go backward and forward with them. This seemed so reasonable to the gentleman that he gave his consent, and the company had the honour of his co-partnership till it was ultimately disposed of to the Sheriff's officer.

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Thomas Cross had got to know King’s Lynn well during the time he drove the Union stagecoach. It was a prosperous, bustling place with iron-foundries, flour-mills, an oil-mill, a saw-mill, several extensive breweries and large malting establishments. And that was in addition to the town’s main trade: shipbuilding yards, rope-walks and manufactories for sailcloth, sacking and twine. There was money to be made there, but Lynn people had a unique way of measuring their wealth.

It was of course an important port with an extensive foreign trade, principally wine and cork from Spain and Portugal, brandy from France, timber, deals, hemp and tallow from the Baltic together with corn from the northern parts of Europe, oilcake from the various parts of the continent and timber from America. The coasting-trade too was very considerable: a fine species of white sand, much used in the manufacture of glass, was sent in great quantities to Newcastle and Leith; shrimps, which are found in abundance on the coast, were forwarded to London and other places – some on his coach.

Lynn had very good links by river to Brandon and Thetford on the Little Ouse, to Mildenhall and St Edmundsbury on the Lark, the Nene to Peterborough and via various drains and washes to Wisbech, Spalding, Market Deeping and Stamford. All in all townsfolk were used to seeing a variety of craft, but even they were surprised in April 1827 when an eight-oar open boat came down the river carrying undergraduates who’d rowed all the way from Cambridge. They then took a pilot and crossed the Wash to Boston, before rowing the Witham to Tattershall and Lincoln where they attended a service in the Cathedral in full boating costume – astonishing the sober-minded citizens as much as if a canoe of Sandwich Islanders had landed. Their return journey had been less easy for on trying to cross the Wash they encountered rough water which forced them to return to Boston, from which they send their vessel on a timber waggon with three post horses to Wisbech, whilst the crew continued on foot before re-embarking and finally getting back to their colleges. Baylay was stroke, John Mitchell Kemble, A.T. Malkin and Kenelm Digby in the crew

Much money had been spent to improve river flow. The expensive and protracted work to remove the big bend at Eau Brink between Denver and Lynn had not had the effect anticipated. After 1,000 navvies had laboured for three years it had been opened in 1821 when thousands of spectators witnessed a steam packet from Gravesend use it for first time. Within

two years the faster flow of the cut had scoured the Ouse several feet deeper, as hoped, but the ebb tide had deposited more silt on the East side of the harbour to the consternation of the merchants. It took a decade of arguing before a special Act of Parliament awarded them compensation, although new landing stages, better placed than the old, were eventually built up by the silting.

Then, when everything finally seemed to be improving, to town had been devastated by cholera: 120 people were affected and 42 died, including the wife of one of the leading merchants. It also drove the Reverend Edward Edwards out of town. An artist and antiquarian, he'd become disgusted by the way the heart had been ripped out of old Lynn.

The changes in the last 30 years were immense – the East Gate was pulled down because loaded hay carts could not get under the inner arch, the Chapel of the Virgin at Ladybridge – founded in 1320s – was demolished to widen Stonegate after a high tide had swept some of the ruins of the chapel on the bridge. The Red Mount had been used as an observatory but to get to roof they'd made a window into a doorway, weakening it so it cracked letting water in. Even the new Market Cross had been built over a well, so it settled and started leaning before it was demolished in 1831.

The corporation had installed modern steam engines to replace the horse mill to raise water at the Kettle Mills but still South Lynn parish had no public water so people used a stream passing under South Gates which emptied into the Nar through various inn yards. It was here that boys and girls gathered at low water quarrelling for their turn to stand on large stone from which they dipped their pails. And in King's Lynn it was the pails which indicated social position: one old wooden pail meant you were very poor, two wooden ones moderately poor. But two good painted ones with a yoke proved you were moderately rich and two tin pails and a hoop extremely wealthy

Thomas Cross had become acquainted with people of all classes, some of whom had fascinating tales to tell as they bumped and jolted their way to Cambridge.

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Thomas Cross drove the King's Lynn to London Union stagecoach from eight in the morning till seven in the evening and encountered a variety of travellers of all classes. Masters of colleges, Professors, Tutors and Fellows frequently sat beside him along with Church dignitaries and even a Bishop. There were Nobility, Cabinet Ministers, Members of Parliament, Baronets and Squires, Clergy and Gentry, Generals and Admirals and all who resided in, or visited at, the mansions with which the county of Norfolk abounds. To those must be added merchants and bankers, lawyers and doctors, engineers and surveyors, ship-builders and ship-masters. Indeed it would be difficult to describe all the remarkable characters that came under his observation – but he was delighted to try.
They had various reasons for travelling but one was women.

One of the most eminent of his passengers was the Right Honourable Secretary to the Treasury who had a shooting box in Norfolk and was a frequent companion on the box. On one journey it came on to rain so he'd got inside and when they stopped to dine – for he always treated Thomas to a meal - he came laughing into the room, stating that there was a female in the coach who had told him she was about to write a book, her own autobiography, and hoped he would put his name down as a subscriber. "I knew her well", Thomas confided: "she was a frequent customer and in fine weather would seat herself, with her maid, on the roof of the coach and pour in my ears a rhodomontade of unintelligible, self-important occurrences. She was a lady, both by birth and education, who had enjoyed a most exciting life, though the charms which had once attracted so many gentlemen are now on the wane. It was not to be wondered at that she fastened on this distinguished member of the Whig

aristocracy, for his handsome, portly appearance, his urbane manner and general bearing marked him as a man of property. But on this occasion her charms came to nought – for his Lordship had already featured in one book and had no wish to repeat the experience". Thomas explained: About this time a very questionable production had made its appearance, purporting to be the memoirs of a Harriette Wilson, a celebrated courtesan. It featured many of the country's aristocracy and proved an immense financial success for its publisher. She claimed to have had forty lovers of whom more than a few had ridden on the Union coach and shared their experiences with its coachman. Cross would obviously have continued to disclose more secrets than Harriette ever did, had not he sensed that Pickwick was not at keen to be reminded of such amorous entanglements.

There had been another fellow making the journey from London to the fens having already travelled half-way around the world from the convict colonies of Australia. He had been one of those sentenced to eight years transportation for his part in the Littleport riots and was now returning to his family. "I shall not readily forget the violent ebullition of the poor fellow's feelings when informed by my horse-keeper that his wife, to whom he was hastening in the fullness of his heart, had married in his absence", Thomas said sadly.

Then there was Bill Long, a simple-looking countryman wearing a smock-frock who had joined him on the road to London in search of his wife. His tale was a distressing one: he had been a life-time friend of William Cromplin, a farmer's labourer who had shared many a pleasant evening in his house. One Friday Bill's wife had gone out saying she'd not be home all night as she was going to wash for a laundress who was obliged through illness to keep to her bed. But when she did not return next morning he went looking for her, only to be informed she had not been near the place. Then when he'd gone to seek Cromplin's help in finding her, he too had disappeared. It got worse: on returning to his cottage he found he'd been robbed of some silver tea and table-spoons as well as bed-linen and various articles of clothing which he discovered had been pledged in the neighbourhood by his erstwhile friend. It seemed obvious the two had run off together.

But a wife takes a lot of training, and Bill was not prepared to give her up without a struggle. So he'd started walking the road south from Lynn seeking information from anybody he met on the way. It was there that Cross had met him and, it being a quiet day on the Union, he'd offered him a ride to London. As they were passing the stone bridge at Paddington they noticed Cromplin amongst a gang of navvies working on the rail-road and sought the assistance of a Bow-Street mounted officer who took him into custody. But the sight of his own wife, a pretty blue-eyed young woman standing beside the accused in the court, laughing merrily, had convinced Bill that whatever the outcome of the case, this was one marriage that was not going to flourish. And as the railway spread its tentacles further into the country more lives would be blighted.

717

Elliott Smith the auctioneer and Thomas Cross the stage coachman were split over the merit of the railways that were extending their metal lines across parts of the country. The latest Cambridge papers had been full of a pitched battle between English and Irish railroad labourers at Rotherham after the Irishmen had undertaken to work for less wages. When rumours spread that rioters were coming from Marlborough Moor into the town every shop and house had immediately closed and the townsfolk gathered in little knots at the end of their streets anxiously awaiting the assault.

In the battle that followed the English navvies had outnumbered their opponents, two to one. Great bloodshed was only avoided when the contractor and several of the railway directors came between the parties and led 300 Irishmen into the station yard. Magistrates went to placate the 600 English who pulled down the mud huts and cabins of the Irish. That was when

the military had been called in together with artillery and a field piece. Faced with such overwhelming force peace had been restored but as soon as the soldiers were stood down, violence flared once more. Again the Rotherham shops had shut and all business had been suspended as the mob assembled in front of the contractor's house, threatening to pull it down. Everybody was still waiting to see what would happen next.

Despite this plans were still going ahead to bring the railway to Cambridge. A proposal for a line from London had been first debated in 1825 but had come to nothing. Then three years later some gentlemen of capital, influence and respectability had commissioned Mr Walker to survey a direct route between London & York. His line took advantage of the flatness of the countryside compared to other suggested routes on which the gradient was such that there would have to be four extra locomotives to drag each load. Some said the only problem was that a large part of the line was of such an easy nature that it would not exercise the talent of an engineer of the quality of Mr Walker: for 80 miles it was a dead flat and a Lincolnshire blacksmith and a Lincolnshire ditcher would be almost all that was necessary to make it.

However it still involved crossing fenland with all the interference of navigation and drainage that this would entail. Thomas Cross was amongst many locals who felt it would be a mad-brained idea and totally absurd to think of ever procuring a railroad through such a tract of land as the Bedford Level.

But the advantages would be tangible according to the supporters. Each section of the route would be self supporting with a great traffic in malt. The carriage of grain would also be profitable as the three counties of Cambridge, York and Lincoln furnished the principal portion of corn grown in this country, much of it destined for the Capital. The agricultural interest would benefit as much as manufacturing: it was commonly said that farmers were half a century behind the rest of the county in improvement but if they neglected railways they would be a whole century behind

The process had survived the rigorous scrutiny of the House of Commons committee under the chairmanship of Mr Ward – a man of strict integrity and entire impartiality as everybody acknowledged. He'd been so convinced of its success that he'd since bought shares in the Company and was now prepared to serve as one of the Directors so they could have the advantage of his talents. MPs for Hertfordshire and Lincolnshire had also joined the Board while Mr Handley had consented to take bill for the extension of the line to York through Parliament.

Even George Pryme the Cambridge MP who had taken little interest in the proposal at first - in deference, he said, to his constituents whose opinions had been divided as to its merits – now had no hesitation in supporting it. It also had the backing of the most distinguished members of the University and Christopher Pemberton from Trumpington who acted professionally for residents and proprietors on the line for nine miles from Cambridge toward London.

There was no doubt: the track from London to Waltham Cross through Tottenham and Edmonton would be finished and yielding a profitable return within a year while the whole line to Cambridge would be completed within two. At least that was what they had said two years ago but as yet there was no sign whatsoever of any activity locally. It appeared that one should not rely on the promises of railway promoters for things took far longer and cost far more than they ever predicted.

While the railway line from London was making very slow progress towards Cambridge there was much greater hope for development in another direction.

The Cambridge Transverse Railway had been talked about since 1834. It would link the extensive fisheries of Yarmouth and Lowestoft, the commercial trade of Ipswich and the Norwich manufactories with Cambridge and Huntingdon then run on through to Market Harborough, Leicester and the rest of the country. By connecting the important agricultural and manufacturing towns direct to the ports it would boost trade to Holland, Germany and the Baltic.

It would also avoid the enormous expense of passing through the fens but still pick up traffic arising from lodes, canals and rivers with which it connected.

A committee had been formed including Eliot Yorke, MP, Henry Giblin of Swaffham Bulbeck, Edward Ball of Burwell, John Grafton of Cambridge, Page Gregory Howard from Grantchester and John Mann of Lolworth. Even the Mayor of Huntingdon was on board. Many of the landed gentry had lent their support and promised funds to the banker F.D. Barker of Trinity Street, Cambridge. The whole was administered by James Field, the Company secretary from his offices in Bouverie Street, London

They had employed two eminent engineers. Henry Robinson Palmer had been heavily involved with railways since working with Thomas Telford on the Knaresborough Canal and Railway in 1818. He'd planned a Thames crossing for the Kentish Railway scheme and designed the London docks – though critics said his scheme for an entrance lock was badly planned. This had not stopped him building up an extensive engineering practice in Westminster from which he advised numerous companies. They had included the Norfolk and Suffolk Railway which collapsed after he'd submitted his bill for the engineering fees - £1,573. He continued working away on various other projects including the harbour at Ipswich – which would benefit greatly by this new Transverse Railway scheme. However recently his health had broken down and his involvement was uncertain.

The other was Thomas Fletcher who had made his reputation when asked by John Rennie to work on the Leicester canal. Once that was done he moved up to work on the Aberdeen Canal though when progress was affected by a shortage of funds he'd switched to superintending work on the construction of that city's Union Bridge, the largest single-span granite bridge in the world. After that he'd supervised a number of other large projects including the Gloucester and Berkeley Ship Canal which ran out of money half-way through, leaving him out of pocket. Recently he'd retired to Horningsey where he lived not far from his son, a doctor who'd married a local girl.

Elliott Smith had joined him to survey that part of the route from Bury St Edmunds. It would come into Cambridgeshire through the parish of Westley Waterless then travel north of Kentford to Snailwell taking care not to interfere with Chippenham Park.

Here the estate had been purchased by John Tharp in 1791. He had made his fortune in Jamaica and spent large sums in enclosing his lands – people said every brick in the wall that surrounded it represented a slave he owned in the West Indies. He'd also drained and extended the park to 350 acres creating a beautiful lake nearly three-quarters of a mile long which was home to giant pike weighing over 30 lbs. But it was not to be a peaceful retreat: his eldest son had died six years later and the second – the current owner - was a lunatic. But for the last decade they'd planted about 20,000 trees each year and there was no way they would want anything to do with a railway carrying fish to the Midlands!

If things went to plan the new railway from Ipswich to Leicester would carefully avoid the training and racing grounds at Newmarket, where it would not be wanted. The prospect of racehorses being disturbed by modern steam locomotives was not one to contemplate, Elliott Smith explained.

It would instead connect to the navigable lodes in the parishes of Burwell, Reach, Swaffham Prior, Swaffham Bulbeck, Bottisham and Long Mead where it would be greatly welcomed by two of the men backing the project.

Henry Giblin was the prominent merchant and farmer at Swaffham Bulbeck of whom Pickwick had heard already. The other was Edward Ball of Burwell. He was a brickmaker and miller six days a week, and a Dissenting Minister on the seventh. Both had a profound interest in ensuring their goods could be transported to new markets. The Transverse Railway would carry them on to the Barnwell pool at Cambridge where it would pass near the Gas Works to be benefit of its proprietor, John Grafton, another of the supporters. It would then cross the Cam at Chesterton before linking up with the London and King's Lynn line – should that ever be completed.

After that it would be plain steaming westwards beyond the Ely road and over the open fields to How House where it would cross the Huntingdon turnpike road, keeping clear of the Observatory. On and on it would run through the parishes of Girton and Dry Drayton to Lolworth, home of another of its supporters, farmer John Mann

Lolworth was a very small community which would benefit from the hustle and bustle of the railway. It would bring them prosperity; it might even bring them religion. Certainly the Reverend Henry Martyn who had ministered there at the start of the century had found villagers as ignorant of the gospel as heathens. Although he made the long journey from Cambridge to preach he did not do it with any fervour and quite without animation. The families on whom he'd called after church seemed incapable of comprehending or attending to any saving truths.

In truth Rev Martyn could not feel any burning zeal for the Peppercorns, Carringtons, Carter and Glovers of Lolworth, most of them agricultural labourers. He offered up prayers for their souls but his desires for their salvation were so small that he grieved before God. Once he was half way through a service when one of the small congregation fell down in a fit. The man was carried out and the meeting ended early.

Once he was called to minister to a dying man. After being at his bedside for two hours without the slightest response Henry asked if he should pray with him. The only comment was 'If you like … I don't know that it would do me much good'. All this left him quite dispirited. When the time finally came for him to leave Lolworth for pastures new very few seemed affected at his departure, though one old farmer of a neighbouring parish turned aside to shed tears.

But despite the setbacks Henry Martyn had gone on to become a missionary, travelling out to the subcontinent as chaplain for the British East India Company where he translated the New Testament, Psalms and Book of Common Prayer into Urdu and Persian. But just as he was feeling at home in a foreign land he had succumbed to plague and died. His memory was still revered at Cambridge's Holy Trinity church where he had been stimulated in his ministry by Charles Simeon.

Beyond Lolworth trains would steam on to cross the Huntingdon road near 8th milestone in Fen Drayton parish and pass north of Ashton's mill to the edge of St Ives. Then they would chuff by the Hemingfords to Godmanchester and Huntingdon. The line would cross the river

at Bridge Close, traverse Huntingdon Mill Common near the Gas Works and windmills before bridging the back waters of the Ouse south of Nuns Bridge. It would avoid the race course – and the crowds that gathered for the hangings held there - stay well clear of Hinchingbrooke House and the Sandwiches before passing near Ellington, Spaldwick and Brington and following the valley towards Keystone, south of Thrapston and on to Kettering and Leicester.

It was an ambitious plan which may well still come to fruition, even though things had been exceedingly quiet in recent months. But similar projects had been proposed in the past, though then they involved not railway wagons but canal boats.

720

Thomas Cross, the stagecoach driver, was worried about plans for new railways. He was concerned they would take away the passengers on his regular journey from King's Lynn to London and throw him out of work

It had already happened elsewhere. Since the opening of the London and Birmingham Railway stagecoach proprietors in that area had been forced to lower their fares. Elsewhere others tried to take advantage of the changing scene. No sooner had the railway lines to the north been opened than the Estafette coach from Exeter through Bristol had linked up with the train at Birmingham enabling the traveller from Devon to reach Manchester or Liverpool, a distance of 206 miles, in the short space of 22 hours and still give ample time for refreshment on the road.

However the new travel would be expensive: a person travelling in his own carriage, with his family and one or two servants, as is usual, would have to pay more for the conveyance of the carriage and its contents by rail-road that he would to take a post coach the whole distance. Already the railroad people were increasing their fares all of which made it more than probable that after the novelty has subsided, the stagecoach would continue – except for a few rich people in great hurry.

The new railways were spreading everywhere. Cross had listened to the reports being brought in from coachmen on various routes. Men were labouring both night and day on the Birmingham to Gloucester line building a bridge at Balsall Heath and recently the last keystone had been inserted in the last arch of the Ribble viaduct. Two engines were now plying between Preston and Leyland carrying ballast and removing earth and there were promises that the entire line would be constructed before Christmas. At Chesterfield work had started on excavating the last hill near Tapton House and another railroad was being built to connect Clay Cross with Ashover which would make it much easier to distribute the limestone from their abundant quarries via the North Midland Railway so opening up a greater demand for their products

Vast sums of money were being spent on surveys, legal and parliamentary fees with little guarantee that anything would ever actually be built. Across the country deluded victims were being induced to risk their little, or their all, in extravagant speculations that were supposed to ensure their fortune but would result only in their total and irremediable ruin, or so Cross opined.

Then there was the large amount that had been invested in turnpike trusts over the years. We now had a much better system of roads than ever before, but these had to be paid for. If fewer people use them then tolls would have to be put up, making each journey more expensive and discouraging more people from travelling.

But it was not all negative, Elliott Smith felt. If railways lessened traffic on the overcrowded roads, this must be a bonus. And already it was obvious the roads were much quieter. During the last six months at least 1,000 horses had been sold, the greater part from the Great Northern Road to Birmingham, Manchester and Liverpool. Only recently at Dixon's repository in Barbican, London, 101 animals had been offered for sale, turned out of employment by the railway train. He had joined many town and country buyers who had flocked to the sale hoping for a bargain only to be surprised at the high prices: horses fetched anything between 30 and 50 guineas though a few, which were nearly done up were sold for sums from £4 to £7.

But as far as railways to Cambridge went, Smith could offer some reassurance. The line would never get north of Saffron Walden, Lord Braybrooke would see to that!

721

The Braybrookes dominated the area around Saffron Walden. The name had come into prominence back in the 1700s after John Griffin Griffin made his reputation a military man becoming a field-marshal, colonel of Dragoons and vice-admiral. But his military battles were almost insignificant compared his struggle for an Act of Parliament to win the title of First Lord Braybrooke along with the great mansion at Audley End that went with it.

His was a complicated tale of family lines becoming extinct with a lack of male heirs splitting estates between sisters. Nor was his own domestic life uneventful. His first wife died after 20 years of marriage and ten months later he'd wed again. But no matter how hard he tried there was still no issue.

He had poured his energy and his money into the mansion spending vast sums on craftsmen and renovations to restore its old glories. There was now a state bedroom with blue silk bedcoverings ornamented with gold lace, a library of fine books, a chapel with painted glass windows and a roof decorated with the family arms. Then he'd filled it with portraits including one of King Henry VIII who'd granted the site to Lord Chancellor Audley in 1539 and another of himself with his two wives.

More money had gone on the estate with over £100,000 expended on landscaping his park. Under Capability Brown it had become a beautiful sight with thriving oak and beech trees, deer on the hill, grazing cattle in the pasture and a three-arched bridge across the river. But it was that park which had caused his Lordship to be jeered in the streets of Saffron Walden

In the 1780s plans had been announced for a canal which would revolutionise the prosperity of the town by linking the existing Stort Navigation with Cambridge. Heavy goods from the merchants and wholesale dealers in London could be transported much more easily down the proposed new cut to the Cam rather than carried by boat around the East Anglian coast to Lynn. It was calculated that 200,000 quarters of oats, fen wheat, flowers and cole-seed would pass annually through Walden together with rafts and deals for houses and of course coal. The average ready-money price for the best coal at King's Lynn was about twenty-two shillings a chaldron. By the time it arrived in Cambridge that price was up to thirty shillings. These costs would be slashed once coal came by canal.

Cambridge waggoners who carried immense quantities of butter from the fens to London protested that their trade would have been affected and they would have to halve their prices. Some two hundred waggoners would be thrown out of work, they claimed - but surely they could find work on the boats instead, others asked.

The Rector of Duxford was concerned that should a navigation be constructed then it would go through a meadow in his parish and that the boatmen would cause havoc by stealing

poultry. Not so, came the rebuttal: boatman already lived well, they always had the best beef and the best bread on their boats. They always sought out the best beer too so Duxford's inns would benefit from their custom.

The Rector came up with another problem: corn coming down the canal would reduce the price of grain in the neighbourhood – but this would bring down prices by twopence a stone to the great relief of the parish poor. The grandson of the notorious Dr Bentley, former Master of Trinity College, whose estates lay nearby, saw things differently. With a canal farmers could sell grain for a shilling or eighteen-pence a quarter more than they currently did. And cheaper coal would mean his tenants would be less inclined to poach his woods.

Huntingdon gentry backed the scheme: they could export goods along the Old West from Earith to the Cam and down the canal to the London market. Even the Earl of Sandwich supported it.

Just one man stood in the way: Lord Braybrooke. For the canal would run through a portion of his newly-landscaped grounds and spoil the view. This he would not tolerate. There was no point in being an aristocrat with Parliamentary influence if you could not ensure that your interests were protected. Using all his power he ensured the scheme was rejected, despite his impoverished neighbours raising an enormous £9,000 as a fighting fund in support. 'We do not hold ourselves as any part of his property, not dependant on his will' they'd claimed. But they were.

And now another Lord Braybrooke was fighting the same fight, this time against the railway.

722

Richard Neville, the third Lord Braybrooke, took a great interest in the conditions of the poor in the area around his Audley End mansion.

He had chaired the new Saffron Walden Union Board of Guardians and made land available for the building of the new Union Workhouse, the one which had been the target for a massive protest organised by Frederick Maberley and which had subsequently mysteriously burnt down. But he soon tired of the long boring meetings and of the problems of collecting the rates that made the system work.

However it was His Lordship who caused some of these problems for when the time came for the assessors to go over his Audley End mansion to enable them to work out what he should contribute to the coffers, Braybrooke resolutely refused to allow them to enter. This had led to a confrontation that had involved the Guardians in meetings and yet more meetings, prompted ratepayers protests and resulted in extensive and expensive legal battles before they gave in. It was all very reminiscent of the actions of the First Lord in repelling the advances of the canal proprietors and of the present incumbent in opposing railways.

But although he would fight to defend the lands within his park, Braybrooke had been content to give up some of his fields in nearby Littlebury to try and prevent riots on his doorstep.

By the 1820s the problem of unemployment had risen tremendously. Many men had been set to work on the roads by the Saffron Walden parish surveyor, which made it easier for those with carriages to get around. But it all had to be paid for from the parish poor rates. Braybrooke had tried to alleviate the long-term sufferings of ratepayers by encouraging the poor to emigrate, offering families £100 to pack up and take the boat to Canada. But although the scheme had some success it was the younger men with small families who those who took up the challenge whilst the older workers with more dependents continued to be a burden.

Braybrooke understood the problems which led men to poach and the dangers this involved – indeed his Lordship had himself been caught in a hare snare set on his own Audley End estate when he had been held so tightly that he was unable to move until being released by one of his gamekeepers. One particularly vocal pauper had stood up for himself: 'For whom am I to be sober? For whom am I to save? ... For the parish? If I am diligent, shall I have leave to build a cottage? If I am sober, shall I have land for a cow? If I am frugal, shall I have an acre of potatoes? You offer no motives; you have nothing but a parish officer and a workhouse'

Then in the autumn of 1829 whilst sitting in the library overlooking his extensive grounds Braybrooke had been reading his favourite publication, 'The Quarterly Review'. In it there was a lengthy article on means of improving the conditions of the labouring classes, citing schemes such as Canadian emigration like that he had tried in Walden. It had quoted conditions in Finchingfield where during the previous winter upwards of fifty able-bodied men destitute of any species of employment had wandered the streets and lanes in daytime before queuing up for their allowance for the following day. Shortly afterwards the stacks of one of the farmers had been set on fire. Some of the incendiaries were discovered, convicted and executed. It was an extreme way of reducing the problem of poverty.

But it was worse than that: out of work men were spending much more time in the tumbled-down shacks that were their home, a place that should have been the preserve of their wives. More and more squabbles were breaking out, more and more beatings being administered and suffered, not all by the female sex. And inevitably more and more babies were being conceived, adding to the overcrowding and the parish expenses.

Children were growing up in households with no regular income and why should they consider working whilst their fathers and grandfathers did not? Big houses, like Audley End, depended on servants but already he had noticed that servant girls were less obliging, more indolent and more depraved than they ought to be. The picture the article painted was one that rang too many bells.

But it also came up with a possible solution, proposed by a landless peasant in Landbeach.

723

In the autumn of 1829, Lord Braybrooke of Audley End had been worried about the continuing discontent raging around his gates. Could the answer lie in the soil? The enclosure movement had swept aside the individual strips of arable land that had previously surrounded every village and been farmed by individual people. Could some of these be brought back as allotments to placate the poor? It would give them something to do in the long hours they would otherwise spend moaning about their hardship, it would keep them away from the pubs and the company of other discontents. It would enable them to grow vegetables to feed the constantly-growing families that were now such a burden on the parish poor rates that he had to pay. And – he was quick to realise – the income he would get from numerous small allotments would be higher than renting entire fields to a farmer in the usual way.

His Lordship owned land on a hill behind the church at Littlebury – far enough away from his mansion - which he laid out in 34 allotments varying in size from thirty-one to forty-seven rods. The rent was fixed at three-pence per rod but there would be no demand for rates of any kind and the parish was tithe free. Having so many tenants dependant on him for their livelihood it took little persuasion to ensure the allotments were soon taken and that the rents came in regularly. He was fortunate that the season proved very favourable and the crops were both good and abundant.

Then as an inducement Braybrooke followed the example of Lord Hardwicke of Wimpole Hall and offered prizes for the best allotments. He brought in the Vicar as one of the judges

which ensured that everybody expressed themselves very happy and more and more peasants came forward for a bit of land they could cultivate for themselves.

The scheme was copied at nearby Saffron Walden where it was championed by one of his Lordship's supporter, John Player whose turn it was to be one of the Overseers of the Poor. A Spade Husbandry Committee was established and a couple of wealthy bankers offered some disused land in Lime Kiln Field. They were overwhelmed with applicants quickly filling up the allotted space so the Committee decided to limit the maximum size of each man could have and to give those poor men with large families first refusal – after all they cost more to keep on the parish.

Even so they could not keep up with demand and begged prominent landowners to rent them more underused fields. But John Emson the draper never replied to the appeal, Thomas Catlin said he needed his ten acres for himself and John Archer refused outright, being worried about having allotments tended by the poor too near his own boundary.

So it was Lord Braybrooke who enhanced his reputation for philanthropy by filling the breach. He offered seven acres beside his park wall, though he demanded a very high rent for it. Others showed their support: John Archer ploughed the land for free, the Vicar waived the Tithe and her Ladyship paid for a well to be dug. Others erected gates, planted hedges and supplied 300 apples trees. The Horticultural Society came forward to offer prizes.

Despite all this the demand for allotments was not fulfilled so the Gibson family, Quakers who had already established the Bridge End Gardens, offered land to workers in their own milling business. Soon 450 more men, wives and children had something to do to fill up their time. It was all most beneficial: Saffron Walden became awash with home-grown vegetables sold at prices somewhat cheaper than elsewhere and this reduced the price being paid by the workhouse for food to feed their inmates. Still some of the large landowners resisted the request for them to surrender some of their acres. However they changed their minds when an outbreak of rioting spread across the surrounding county. As farms nearby were engulfed in flames Walden remained calm: its labourers were too tired working to have time for riot.

724

The idea of giving the poor an allotment of land they could farm for themselves was being debated in the drawing rooms of stately homes around the land. In these dangerous times anything that might ensure peace was worth considering. When riots had threatened at Saffron Walden the men had stayed loyal, indeed when somebody chalked "This house to be burnt" on the property of one of the principal promoter of the allotments scheme nearly 50 labourers came forward to offer to watch his premises. From being ready to riot they had been transformed into special constables ready to protect public order because they now had an interest in maintaining it

This more amenable work-force was also one more easily controlled. For the right to an allotment depended on abiding by the rules laid down, and these did not just relate to the maintenance of the soil. Elliott Smith had seen the conditions to be observed by the tenants of the allotment land at Stretham.

They were the usual things: The land was not to be underlet, nor any live stock fed upon it. Instead it was be cultivated solely by spade husbandry – this was particularly important. For it took more time to dig by spade than to plough, it tired a man out more. It was also far better for the soil especially if, as decreed, two cart loads of manure were to be spread each year. Allotment land could be cropped with corn, vegetables or fruit but not more than half a rood was to be planted with potatoes nor two white straw crops taken in succession. There were

restrictions preventing any tenant from working on his allotment between six in the morning and six at night without permission of his employer – no sneaking out during dockey time for a quick hoe! Then the most important of all: 'Any persons convicted of theft, of deserting his wife and family or of any other offences against the laws of the country to be immediately deprived of his allotment without remuneration for labour or planting or for the value of the crop thereon'.

At Saffron Walden one man had been ejected after being caught poaching. He had quickly appreciated that such crime did not pay, for his crop of potatoes had been almost ready to be dug and would have kept the family fed throughout the entire winter. Now he would have to buy them from other allotment holders. He had since begged to be allowed to take an allotment again. Nor was this the only proof: not a single prisoner had been brought before the magistrates in the past five sessions

Money spent on the poor rate had dropped dramatically; numbers of men who used to be employed in stone picking and road mending – work much reduced now that main roads were maintained by the Turnpike Trusts – were now working for themselves. There were no shortage of allotment takers and indeed many were petitioning to be allowed even larger plots. Trustees were not so sure: a man should start with a small portion of land in the first instance, let him prove he could farm well enough and beg for more. It would add to his reluctance to risk anything that might see it taken away from him.

Elliott Smith had witnessed the growth of allotments as he'd travelled round with the Government Commissioners investigating the state of charities. At Waterbeach, home of John Denson whose articulation of the value of allotment had caught Braybrooke's eye in the first place, a considerable piece of land had been let to labourers in allotments of half-an-acre. One seventy-year-old man told the parliamentary men he was making a clear profit of seventy-shillings a year from his plot, while a widow looking after her small daughter and a sick mother was able to maintain herself without becoming a burden on the poor rate. The only people complaining were the publicans who had found that their beer sales had plummeted now men were working so late into the night.

At Great Staughton the land was ploughed once, then dug over and a considerable quantity of corn grown. At Elton ten tenants held land free of tithes and poor-rates provided they promised not to apply for other relief and not to expect employment from village farmers except in the hay season and during the harvest. But farmers complained that other men were tiring themselves out by going on their allotment very early in the morning and were unfit for a proper day's work.

Not everybody was so enthusiastic: at Orton Longville overseers had offered a labourer a piece of land rent free and even promised to supply the seed potatoes. He'd declined, saying that his day's work was enough for him, he didn't want the spuds and that if he was hungry then the parish would pay. But at Upton six labouring men had taken an acre of land each in addition to their cottage gardens. One also worked as a labouring gardener whenever he could find a job, while two others kept a horse and cart with which they went around the country collecting bones for sale.

725

Support for the merits of allotments was being voiced across the area. At Mildenhall they had turned improvident people into provident and any man without an allotment considered himself two shillings a week worse off than those who had. The trustees considered that smaller quarter-acre allotments were better than bigger ones. Two-acre plots had been tried but found to be too large: they were always badly cultivated, the holders tried to keep a cow

but it always wandered off and ended up in the parish pound. Besides people spent so much time on their allotment that they lost regular employment. At Framlingham John Pierson considered allotments worked best when the master supplied horses to plough with and charged the man a day's work for their hire – it worked out cheaper than digging it by hand when the cost of labour was taken into consideration. It benefited the poor of Snarehill by withdrawing them from the temptation of the public house since it gave them something to do on those days which started wet but then cleared too late for them to go to work.

The Rev Philip Gurdon was most enthusiastic about its effects in his parish of Cranworth, a scattered parish near Watton in Norfolk, to which he'd been appointed by the Theophilius Thornaugh Gurdon, his father in 1832, just a few years after leaving Trinity College.

In 1829 when he first moved there he'd been forcibly struck by the discreditable appearance of the poor's and the surveyors' land, the former having been set out at the time of enclosure for the benefit of the poor, the latter for the repair of the high roads although it contained no material that could be applied for that purpose. One of the first things he'd done was to call a parish meeting where he succeeded in hiring the lands for a term of years. Some of it was an unshapen mass of clay-pits and holes, whist the other was badly farmed and flogged almost to ruination, growing only 16 bushels per acre of wheat and 25 of barley.

The parson had one field levelled, trenched and divided it into half acres, using the unemployed as workmen. These plots were allotted to those labourers he considered to be of good character and who had families. But horse-men were only allowed a quarter of an acre as they'd have less time to work them and were not likely to be spared by their masters for an occasional half-day as the others might

Gurdon was worried about the temptation to dishonesty such a scheme might present to certain of his flock. So he arranged that each allotment was enclosed by a small ditch – some said a moat – to stop one man encroaching on his neighbour's plot. And each plot had a gate to prevent carts or ploughs being taken onto it. He considered this essential as the allotments were in some cases nearly a mile from the holders' houses and they'd have no way of keeping watch over the crops of wheat or potatoes they were allowed to grow. He'd kept a careful check on progress – the best crops had been of copdock wheat and golden drop, while Tartarian oats outperformed Poland oats on the clayey land. Potatoes did well, producing some 120 to 140 sacks per acre.

Tenants were not allowed to keep stock on their allotments but each was obliged to keep a pig at home and told to spread the manure on the land, which improved the fertility of the soil. Elsewhere farmers objected to such a practice. Pigs were no doubt a good thing but they brought temptations that would be best avoided – the men were likely to pinch turnips and corn to feed to their animals

It was quickly apparent that most of the work on the allotment was done by women and children while the men carried on as before. But this taught the youngsters to get accustomed to working, even if the prospect of proper employment was as remote as ever. What was even more important, the poor were thankful and their morals improved. Even the farmers who'd expressed a strong prejudice against the idea of allotments had started to come round to his way of thinking.

There were problems elsewhere: at Stradbrooke some allotment tenants broke the rules which forbade them from putting stock on the allotment; inevitably the cows strayed onto other tenants' plots which caused bad feelings. This led to a number of men being thrown off their land and the introduction of a regime of strict supervision which upset the law-abiding majority. Then when others planted fruit trees it encouraged village boys to steal the apples, which was bad enough. But to get to the allotments the lads would sneak across farmers'

fields sowed with corn in which they'd hide until the coast was clear thus causing considerable damage to the crops. All in all it was making criminals of the very people who they were trying to keep on the straight and narrow.

726

Allotments were being touted as one way of keeping men out of beer houses. But just a few years earlier beer houses themselves had been promoted as a way of tackling drunkenness!

The country had become besotted with gin. As Hogarth had depicted in his prints and Pickwick had seen with his own eyes, men and women were sprawling in the streets of London and the whole of society seemed doomed to drown in spirits. Intoxicating liquor had become a regular part of almost every important event in life: no celebration of baptism, marriage and funeral, nor anniversary, holiday or festival was complete without it. Even the commercial transactions of purchase and sale were accompanied by booze. The gentry had set a potent example and where the gentry led the poorer classes had followed.

It was all having an impact on health, as Henry Bond from Addenbrooke's Hospital lamented. It had resulted in disease of every form and shape from premature decrepitude in the old to stunted growth and general debility in the young. Even babies were being poisoned at birth by the alcohol in their mother's milk. Across the country one day a week was being lost through intemperance while even the efficiency of the army and navy had been undermined – nine-tenths of all the acts of insubordination were down to drunkenness. And the cost was enormous: the sum spent on intoxicating dinks in the city of Glasgow alone was nearly equal to the whole amount expended by public institutions of charity and benevolence in the entire United Kingdom.

Something had to be done and it was Parliament that had acted. The Beer Act of 1830 had been passed by the Tory Government, against great opposition from the brewers, a fair proportion of who were themselves Tories. It had tried to change society.

Traditionally the inn had been the social centre of the community. Here there was contact with the world beyond the village through travellers' gossip over a glass of beer or the out-of-date newspapers that appeared on the table having previously been read by the squire and parson. Farmers and tradesmen met in the bar to discuss political, social and economic questions with each other and with the landlord who seemed to have an opinion on every subject. Labourers, who could talk more freely in the absence of their masters, preferred the taproom or the kitchen. All classes of society might pass each other as they entered or left or whilst relieving themselves of the liquid of whatever quality they had consumed – a function common to all, master or man.

The Beer Act sought to change all this. No longer could inns provide rooms for meetings of Friendly Societies, sick clubs, money clubs or Masonic lodges. No longer could the farmer pay wages at a public house and every man was to be given the exact amount so he wouldn't need to visit the pub to get change. What was more, wages were to be paid at or before breakfast hour on the mornings of the principal market days to allow the wives to buy provisions before their husbands had the chance to spend it.

It also introduced a more humble establishment: the beerhouse. Now anybody could put up a sign with their name and 'Licensed to sell Beer by Retail' in three inch high white letters on a black background above the doorway – provided they paid two guineas to the Excise office. Dozens took the opportunity to open a room attached to their cottage be it in the village, on the edges of the common or in other remote places. Around Royston cheap buildings with mud rooms and mud cellars had been thrown up just to sell beer, while the five old-

established Histon pubs had been supplemented by two beer houses with another two at Fen Ditton, one kept by a bricklayer the other by a man with no capital whatsoever.

But it was not intended as an encouragement to drunkenness – indeed it was just the reverse. Opening hours could be severely restricted by local justices to suit local circumstances and none could sell beer for more than two hours on the Sabbath – just time enough for local families to get their supplies. And the beer that they sold would be home-brewed, not the high-strength porter produced by the large brewing firms who regularly met to fix their prices in spite of supposed competition between them. Now a working man could save a penny or two a pint, quenching his thirst without emptying his pocket so quickly or getting quite as drunk. It was a fine hope, it had not worked out.

727

As a man who conducted many sales in public houses Elliott Smith could testify that the number of places selling beer had greatly increased in most parishes in recent years. Apart from Longstanton: when William Golding tried to set one up there he'd found difficulty getting the requisite number of ratepayers to support him. Everybody agreed that another drinking house was needed: there were only two pubs in the parish of 500 souls and one of those was two miles from the village. Often eight or nine carts would be standing at the door of the other on their return from market, even though the beer was frequently bad. The problem was that the lady who owned that pub also owned most of the houses in the village and none of her tenants dare sign his application.

There had been problems too at Milton where the White Horse had closed depriving the village of anywhere for the Friendly Society to meet or drovers to find accommodation. The landlady at another pub was bed-ridden and the third did not qualify to sell liquor. But magistrates had blocked William Bicheno of the Lion and Lamb beer house when he applied for a full license.

Elsewhere small shopkeepers who had scraped together a few pounds and little tradesman who had retired too soon ventured their capital in a business that did not require very much looking after and where the returns promised to be both quick and large. Many had visions of producing their own beer which would be better and cheaper than that supplied by the big brewers. But they soon realised that this would need more space than they had in their small premises and the cost of setting up a copper capable of brewing two barrels at a time would be about £40. One sour brew could be disastrous and if the beer tasted good then they would drink it all themselves in a day. Soon the brewers' beer was back as bad as ever.

But the drinkers did not go for the beer, they went for the companionship and the new beerhouses afforded a convenient place of rendezvous for the idle and dissipated. There the poacher, the thief and the incendiary were sure of getting a quart for their money and fire and candle for nothing. Inevitably they drank more beer than they could afford but a bundle of wood, a few turnips, a hare, or a rabbit helped reduce the debt to the landlord.

There were complaints from magistrates who blamed beerhouses for a very great increase of crime. Clergy like William Metcalf from Fowlmere were convinced they also encouraged dissolute and vicious habits – he was sure there were some which were little better than brothels. Fowlmere had been the centre of conflict at Christmas 1830 when most of the farm labourers had gone on strike for higher wages and bullied others to join them. The men had gathered near the Swan public house and jeered the magistrate as he read the Riot Act ordering them to disperse. A force of mounted special constables from Royston assisted by some of the principal gentlemen had succeeded in arresting the ringleaders after a desperate

skirmish and conveying them to the county gaol. Perhaps if the beer had been stronger the resistance would have been less!

Elsewhere gamekeepers found they could scarce keep a bird or rabbit on the whole manor and the farmers wife declared that ever since the beerhouse had opened it had been all the worse for her hen-house and dove-cote. There had been many moans from the wives of labourers. Nearly 20 Bassingbourn women complained that their husbands and sons were spending all their money in the beer-shops. One man who earned wages of nine or ten shillings gave his wife only two bob, yet the women dare not make a formal complaint for fear of being beaten.

Those convicted of drunkenness were put into the stocks for six hours but didn't seem concerned, looking on it as a convivial way of passing time. It would be far better to refuse them the parish poor relief which was funding their drinking, but this neither overseer nor magistrate dare do. The Reverend John Hoggett from Fen Ditton was pragmatic: he could apply to a constable but they were hard-working men, sometimes labourers, who had to live in the village and dare not interfere for fear of reprisals.

So as long as there was no gross violation of decency or open breach of the peace and even though villagers might want to see the nuisance swept away which was corrupting their labourers, making them dissatisfied and bringing them to poverty, neither the ratepayer, nor squire, clergyman, overseer nor constable could prevent the renewal of the license when the proper time came around.
But in Cambridge there was the University to contend with.

728
If excessive drinking was a problem in Cambridgeshire, it was also an issue in Cambridge itself. For centuries the University had claimed the right to license ale-houses, along with virtually everything else.

For Joseph Romilly the University registrary it was a regular routine for licensees to queue up quietly in alphabetical order, parish by parish, bringing with them a testimonial signed by a minister, churchwarden and overseer to prove they were fit people to sell beer. They paid their fees and collected a piece of paper that would allow them to trade for another year. Provided of course that they promised to obey the rules: they must not allow any scholar to keep a horse in their stable without college permission, there should be no drinking during service time on Sunday, no carding or dicing, drunkenness or disorder. Despite these restrictions there had been always plenty of applicants: one session in 1837 he'd been busy processing 137 landlords. But the next one saw just four in the queue. Now Romilly was busy trying to bring the numbers up again.

The University claimed that regulating beerhouses was an historic duty exercised by their Vice Chancellor both in his academic capacity and as a magistrate. The two roles had automatically gone together as his position gave him authority over both town and gown. There had been challenges in the past, indeed Sir Walter Raleigh had disputed it in the reign of Good Queen Bess, but even then the situation was well established.

However under the recent Municipal Reform Act all magistrates had to be nominated by the Crown and because of an oversight the Vice Chancellor had been left off the list from 1st May to 17th October that year. During those few weeks Cambridge town magistrates took the opportunity to act against the old enemy. They announced that they would also grant licenses to sell beer and two hundred local innkeepers came forward, knowing that if they were refused then that ruling could be challenged whereas the University powers were exercised in secret with no appeal. What was worse, as the Vice Chancellor could grant a license he could also withhold one. He might justifiably claim that the Proctors had more accurate and detailed

information than the magistrates about which ale-houses were undesirable haunts for undergraduates – but why should that prevent them serving beer to townsfolk?

This audacious challenge prompted a rapid response from the Vice-Chancellor, Dr George Archdall the Master of Emmanuel College. He was anxious not to lose any of the privileges and income that the University had hitherto enjoyed and issued a proclamation asserting that the sole and exclusive right of licensing was vested in him, warning people against keeping inns, alehouses or victualling houses without his permission.

But the Corporation would have none of it: such a claim to exclude a person from trade was a monopoly of grossest character and against common law. They went to court demanding that the Vice Chancellor prove by what authority he had taken in on himself to license ale houses. Thus it was that Romilly had been trawling through ancient charters dating back to time of Henry III together with statutes and other documents, ancient and modern. They showed the Vice Chancellor had exercised such powers for centuries but they did not actually prove he had the right to do so: it might even be a usurpation of the power of the crown, lawyers warned.

Anyway that was the olden days. Under the recent Reform Act excise licences were to be granted by magistrates and why should Cambridge be the sole exception to that rule. Even in Oxford the Vice Chancellor considered such activity as inconsistent with his office as head of a University.

So now both continued to issue licences to sell beer, each accusing the other of acting illegally in doing so. The matter seemed destined to rumble on for some time yet, a battle between town and gown which the town looked likely to win. It would be a bitter irony if it was beer that finally broke the power of the University to control everything that happened in Cambridge.

729

If anybody was going to challenge the power of the University then it ought to be the brewers.

IN 1831 the compiler of 'Gradus ad Cantabrigiam' had commented: "Cambridge has long been celebrated for its ale – and we have ourselves quaffed no small quantity of that inspiring beverage" And following the success of the Coronation Festival on Parker's piece – just weeks ago – brewers were in good books, as Elliott Smith explained.

There had been a number of them on the various committees including James Twiss, Jacob Warwicker, William Ellison and Alderman James Nutter – which Pickwick considered a suitable name for a brewer.

The beer committee arranged that the smaller brewers should have the first choice of supplying ale at the cost price of two pounds a barrel. The big brewers made up any difference and to avoid doubt as to the quality Mr Bacon, Mr Skrine and Mr Litchfield, had gone round all 18 breweries to ascertain, by tasting, whether the public would approve. They'd done a good job: nobody had complained even though each man had to down three pints, each woman one and even children slaked their thirst with a half-pint.

In all 99 barrels of ale had been ordered at a total cost was £191 though Charles Wagstaff who had a brewery in Sidney Street was paid for 12 barrels and presented another four free. The other large supplier was Mr William Apthorpe of the new Victoria Brewery on Newmarket Road. Amongst the others selected were Francis Eaden - who in 1837 had brought two breweries on Quayside from Mr Berry, only to have to find a claim from J.G.

Bell that one of those was his - and Richard Foster & Son whose brewery was also on the Quayside, next door to the Anchor.

As well as the ale for the dinner, they'd also supplied prizes for the sports that had followed including a gallon of Sam Moore's regular, Right-sort, Head-strong, Out-and-out, Strong-bodied, Ram-jam, Come- it-strong, Lift-me-up, Knock-me-down, How d'ye-like-it, Genuine Midsummer-Green Stingo. Now that was a brew – the stoutest, brightest and best beer guaranteed to cure any bodily aches sustained in winning it

Stingo had been praised in verse by Samuel Taylor Coleridge in 1801:
"Ye drinkers of Stingo and Nappy so free,
Are the gods on Olympus so happy as we!
They cannot be so happy.
They drink no nappy.
But what if nectar, in their lingo,
Is but another name for stingo?
Why then, we and the gods are equally blest,
And Olympus an ale-house as good as the best.

It was not quite in the same quality as his 'Rhyme of the Ancient Mariner" which had made him such a respected figure in poetic circles, but probably reflected his time in Cambridge.

Coleridge had first arrived by the night coach far too early for the start of term and sat down to dine alone and in silence, apart from the sound of suction that accompanied his soup. He had not been impressed at the quality of the food: the mutton and winter cabbage were confoundedly tough, though very venerable for their age. Nor had he appreciated his room at Jesus College: it was damp and he was soon nailed to his bed in a fit of rheumatism. The town was fertile in alleys and mud, and cats and dogs besides men, women, ravens, clergy, proctors, Tutors and owls. It was a palace of winds that brought on a violent cold that was only eased by a liberal application of opium.

He had however enjoyed the companionship of his fellow undergraduates and formed a literary society to which he read a number of poems. But as academic pressures mounted he'd deserted his studies and enlisted in the army as a dragoon under an assumed name, only to be constantly falling off his horse and dismissed as 'insane' after a small Greek book had been found in the holsters of his saddle. At this he'd returned to the University, though Jesus had long-since decided to remove him from their records, and was confined to college for a month only for him to run away again a couple of months before he was due to sit his final examinations

But having gone on to great renown, despite his lack of University education, he had returned just a few years ago to revisit the haunts of his youth, staying once more at Jesus College on a bed which he complained was like a couple of sacks of potatoes tied together. By then he was a much-revered figure whose name was likely to be remembered in Cambridge long after his youthful transgressions were forgotten.

730

Both Elliott Smith and Thomas Cross were travelling men with many a tale to tell of the inns in which they had slaked their thirst, conducted their auctions or changed their horses. They both had memories of the Lamb Inn, Ely.

Smith had known it since Henry Rance had been landlord. He'd been one of the most hated men in the area in 1816 after he'd hired out the chaise and pair that had carried the deputy chief bailiff and clergyman to witness the execution of the Littleport men following the riots.

Others – like the man who'd made the coffins on which the lads had sat on their final journey to the scaffold – had since mysteriously disappeared from the scene but Henry continued to trade until his death in 1826. After that his widow Martha had carried on for a couple of years, then sold up to Mr William Beecroft who'd previously been landlord of the White Hart Inn.

Beecroft decided to rebuild the old Lamb and took a nearby building where he carried on trading during the refurbishment. When it reopened it boasted a couple of lock-up coach houses and stabling for thirty horses. Inside there was room for twenty beds with four good sitting rooms, a bar, Market Room and a commercial room which was used for various meetings such as Turnpike and Drainage trustees and many sales. Most importantly there was a large dining room. When he sold it in June 1834 it was described by the auctioneer's puff as 'one of the first and best-frequented houses in the country'

That was not Thomas Cross' assessment. He related: "I was standing one afternoon in the bar of the 'Lamb' - a small slip taken from the passage with an uneven brick floor, a few shelves upon which stood some dusty bottles and from which dangled, by way of ornament, some cabbage-nets holding pieces of half-squeezed musty lemon. Looking through the latticed window, I saw a gentleman advancing up the yard and overheard him enquire of the landlady, what he could have for dinner. 'Pitchcocked eels and mutton chops, sir', was the answer. 'I might have known that', said he 'I have used this house five-and-twenty years and never had any other answer'. Then he invited me to join him and shouted to the waiter 'Dick, lay the cloth for two - the best room in the house. My wine, remember' adding 'I am obliged to be particular or they'd give you sloe juice and call it port wine'

"We went into the best room, which by the hostess's directions had been put to rights – at least the floor had been fresh sanded, all that could be done at so short a notice. It had an unlit fire surrounded by a steel fender with an edge sharp enough to sever any limb from the body that might accidentally fall on it, and some very lean fire-irons, that might have been forged by Tubal Cain himself. There were half-a-dozen chairs and an old club-footed mahogany table covered with a cloth that matched the floor in colour and evenness of surface. Some black-handled knives and forks were properly disposed at each end, while two blown-glass salt-cellars with diminutive bone spoons ornamented the opposite corners.

"My new acquaintance took up one of the forks and he jammed it twice or thrice through the homespun, advising me to do the same, as it was the only way, he said, to ensure clean steel. The marks which this operation left behind gave ample proof of its necessity, but did not prevent either of us making as good a meal as the scanty supply of fish, with a chop to follow, allowed. At least the port wine was good.

"Then it was time for pudding and the waiter entered with a pie. Gently removing the crust of the colour and consistency of a piece of parchment, my friend counted twenty bottled goose-berries at the bottom of a very shallow dish. 'Is this all you have in the house?' he asked. 'That's what mistress allows generally to two gentlemen, Sir'," replied the waiter as he shuffled away, his feet kicking up sand. 'Economy is the order of the day here' I observed. 'You might have given it a more appropriate name, I think,' my dining companion replied."

731

Thomas Cross had called at the Lamb Inn at Ely regularly when driving his stagecoach from London to King's Lynn but never actually stayed there out of choice. There had been one occasion in the February of 1831 when the weather had turned vicious. He'd managed to guide his horses along the road from Cambridge though it was almost covered in snow, but on

arrival at the Lamb learned there had been a heavy fall of snow in the neighbourhood of Lynn and it would be in vain to attempt to go any farther as the road was quite impassable.

As he recalled a lady inside passenger had been very anxious to proceed, as her daughter, who resided at Lynn, was ill. She said she would willingly trust her life in the hands of friend Cross, as she had every confidence in his care and skill (having ridden with him several times before) but if he said it would not be prudent to proceed, she would as willingly remain.

So as the day was closing, the other passengers agreed to shelter for the night. All but the lady huddled around what passed for a fire. They included the parson of Watlington, Richardson Coxe and two outside clergymen passengers related to the Styleman family of Snettisham. They were discussing the one missing passenger who'd ridden up from London and had given a book to each of two young men, no doubt students, who'd got off in Cambridge.

Then a female servant had entered to say that the lady upstairs was desirous of speaking to her companions in travel, if they felt disposed to attend her. Strange as this request seemed, they decided to obey. Cross continued: "On entering the room, I saw a fine, matronly lady, dressed as a Quakeress, seated at the table with the Bible before her. An air of placid benevolence illumined a countenance that had not yet given up all pretensions to meridian beauty; and the serenity of her brow gave a sort of hallowed expression to eyes that beamed with intelligence. Her attitude and the solemn dignity of her demeanour reminded me for a moment of Mrs. Siddons

"She asked us to be seated then stated that, as chance had thrown us together that evening, she thought a few words from the Book of Life would not be unacceptable. She read some verses from a portion of St. John's Gospel then discussed them in a mild, unaffected, and unassuming spirit. After that she dismissed us with an extempore prayer, invoking the blessing and mercy of the Almighty.

"Now I'm not one who normally indulges in such religious discussion but even I was enraptured. I felt as if in the presence of a being of a superior order so I asked who she was. Rev Coxe told me he'd recognised her as soon as she's boarded. She was none other than Elizabeth Fry, the great prison reformer, and was making her way to Lynn where one of her daughters, Rachel, was seriously ill. The book she'd distributed to the undergraduates was the one she'd written and contained texts for each day of the year – she handed them out by the score and they were to be found everywhere from palace to dungeon."

Coxe told us that she'd given one, bound in red leather, to her little grandson, but it fell out of his pocket at the Lynn Mart, where he had gone to visit the lions. He was a very little boy, and much disconcerted at the loss of his book, for his name was in it, and that it was the gift of his grandmother.

Then he added: "Nearly a year later I was sent to the wife of a man, living on a wild common at the outskirts of Watlington, a notorious character between poacher and rat-catcher. The medical man who attended her, said she had changed – 'you will find the lion become a lamb' and so it proved. She, who had been wild and rough, whose language had been violent and her conduct untamed, lay on a bed of exceeding suffering, humble, patient and resigned. It seemed that her child had picked up the lost book and carried it home as lawful spoil. Curiosity had induced her to read it, and she had been totally changed. Sin had in her sight become hateful; blasphemy was no longer heard from her lips. She drew from under her pillow, what she called 'her precious book', her 'dear little book', which had 'taken away the fear of death'. She died soon afterwards, filled with joy and hope believing, in a Saviour" And, he was convinced, her salvation was entirely due to that lady with whom they shared a coach.

732
Rev Richardson Coxe of Watlington considered himself a good judgement of character. But he had been greatly troubled when asked by one of his parishioners, Mr Peed, to give a reference for his daughter.

The girl had been a ladies' maid but decided that her future lay not in Norfolk but in Australia, a country where good domestic servants were in short supply and fortunes could be made. The Government was encouraging people to seize the chance of a new life in a new land and she had decided to apply for one of the berths on an emigrant ship.

In a period of three years more than 2,700 single females had been granted such a free passage but most of the women applying for emigration had other things on their mind: it was notorious that the vast majority of them were – or intended to become – prostitutes. To check such abuse the Government set up an Emigration Committee in 1833 to vet applicants. Girls living in London were made to appear personally before the committee at their office, bringing the best testimonials she was able to procure. The committee then personally investigated the circumstances of each woman assessing her means of maintaining herself, her connexions and who and what the persons were who recommended her.

They did everything that cautious and sensible men could do to ensure themselves as to her fitness as a moral and well-ordered person to be allowed the bounty of Government. If she passed that scrutiny then an official took the testimonials and called on each person who had given them, probing every case to the bottom and then reporting, in writing, upon all the circumstances before the committee admitted or rejected the party applying

But in places deep in the country, such as Watlington, the woman had to send a recommendation from a minister or other person of known unexceptionable standing, attesting to her moral conduct and habit. If there was the slightest doubt then she was rejected.

When Mr Peed had written to ask whether his daughter could get a situation in Australia he had been sent papers showing that good domestic servants were the class of persons most likely to prosper. The climate was certainly very fine, the country rapidly proceeding in prosperity and its population largely on the increase. There was no doubt that morals were much below those of decent society in this country but the hope was that virtuous women, persevering in a right course, would soon alter that for the better. If his daughter still wished to go, and if he sanctioned it, then he had to send a certificate signed by the clergyman and by such other respectable individuals as to her conduct ,certifying that she was a person of unblameable character.

And this was something that the Reverend Coxe had been agonising over. For he knew the girl in question had been acquainted with Hannah Jarvis. Hannah had been one of the women involved in the disgraceful scenes at Downham Market after a group of Southery men had accosted the magistrates during their meeting in The Crown and demanded the release of some of their friends who'd been arrested for poaching. One Justice had managed to escape and send a rider out to Upwell to summon the yeomanry. It had resulted in a standoff with soldiers on one side and armed peasantry on the other. Then both had seen sense, both backed down and went home with a promise that all would be quietly forgotten.

But it was not the men that had been the problem: it was the women. Sarah More, a labouring woman from Hilgay, had demanded bread or blood then broke into Parkinson's shop and ransacked it – stealing not just loaves and flour but hats and umbrellas as well! Other women raided Baldwin's flour mill and a couple of butchers' shops, cutting up some loins of beef from Stimson's and some pork from Wiseman.

This was the ultimate indignity for the traders: it was one thing to back down in the face of armed and desperate poachers, but they could not allow a mob of women to destroy their livelihood. So despite the assurances that all would be forgotten the magistrates had later arrested the ringleaders and nine men and six women had been sentenced to death. They'd only actually only hanged two, but Amelia Lightharness and Hannah Jarvis had been transported to New South Wales

Hannah had been granted a free pardon by the Colonial Secretary in December 1830 after which she'd found work as a servant with William Williams at Scroll River, only to abscond from his service in January 1833. For all the Rev Coxe knew she could still be there. So could he really sign that piece of paper?

733

As driver of the stagecoach from London to King's Lynn, Thomas Cross had come across many characters. Some had been making the journey down to the prison hulks before embarking on the voyage of transportation to Australia. Others were returning home having served their time. One of these was especially poignant, as he recalled: "A man who had been convicted for his part in the Littleport riots, returned on my coach after an absence of eight years, having received an unconditional pardon; and I shall not readily forget the violent ebullition of the poor fellow's feelings when informed by my horse-keeper that his wife, to whom he was hastening in the fullness of his heart, had married in his absence"

But one man Cross would happily have seen being sent the other way: "The first time I met him, he had seated himself on the roof of the coach in Bishopsgate Street while I had gone up to the office in the yard for my way-bill. A fellow driver gave me a short outline of his antecedents, which were not very flattering: it was his common practice to cheat every one he could. Apparently he was quite an adept in the art of making exchanges in hats, great-coats, whips, and even a set of harness he has been known to purloin in this way. He delighted in dishonesty and would take as much trouble to rob a chimney-sweep of sixpence, as he would one of his own class of one hundred pounds.

"This man was a great annoyance to me, although I did not let him see this. He had a bold familiar air and a fluent as well as specious tongue, which, with a tolerable good-looking face, and no small share of impudence, caused him to pass current with many as a man of some import, though it did not require a very keen observer to detect the vulgar character beneath the assumed garb of gentility. He thought himself justified in practising every sort of deception upon the simple and unwary, that he might despoil them of their coin.

"It was one cold frosty morning shortly after Christmas when I was on my journey down with him on the box when a man, having the appearance of a mechanic, held up his hand. I stopped, and, saying he was going to Hoddesdon, he got up and sat on the front of the roof behind us. He was no sooner seated than my hero addressed him. It appeared he was a master-bricklayer earning twenty-five shillings a week and owning four cottages that brought in five pounds a-year each. He then told a tale of deep and pitiable distress: the recent death of his daughter after a long illness, the expense of the doctor, funeral, &c. The fellow pretended to have compassion on him and asked what sum would set him straight with the world. The poor man said twenty pounds would set his mind at rest and the latter immediately unbuttoned his coat, put his hand in his breeches pocket, and took out twenty sovereigns - counterfeits probably - and, holding them up to the man, said 'They are yours when next we stop'. The bricklayer turned his eyes up to heaven in utter astonishment, and invoked God's blessing upon his supposed benefactor. At Hoddesdon we soon arrived, when the schemer turning round to his dupe, said, 'You must give me eighteen-pence to go and purchase the stamp to

put on the receipt'. He then led him into a back room, saying to the landlady, 'Give that poor man a pint of beer,' and desiring him remain there while he went to the post office.

"Instead he came out chuckling to me with the one shilling and sixpence in his hand, exclaiming 'There, Mr. Coachman, that is more than you have earned this morning'. 'Yes,' I said, for I could no longer contain my detestation of his knavish trick; 'And I do not stir from this inn, till you have returned the eighteen-pence you have robbed him of'. My horses were put to and ready but I refused to move until the bricklayer, tired of waiting, or suspecting the trick, came running out. Seeing my determination, the cheat reluctantly, though with a forced laugh, gave him back his one-and-six.

"On our arrival at the next stage, where we lunched, as did the passengers of the Wisbech coach, the fellow went into the room. I followed, and, seeing him shake hands with one of the passengers, whom I knew, said; 'I do not know if you are aware of it, but you are shaking hands with one of the most consummate scoundrels I ever met with' 'Order, order, Sir!' said he; 'order is the first law of nature'. 'True', I replied, 'and it is a pity you have been suffered to violate it so long for you ought to have been hanged long ago'. When he rejoined me, during the remainder of the journey he attempted to ridicule my sympathy for his intended victim, whom he represented as a hypocritical, canting rascal, at the same time extolling his own masterly display of cunning by his almost successful attempt at robbing him of his last shilling, the defeat of which he attributed to my foolish interference. His name has since figured in our police courts but I do not know the law has yet pronounced a proper termination to his knavish career."

734

One of the gentry that had travelled alongside Thomas Cross on the King's Lynn Union stagecoach was Lord William Bentinck. "I found him a not very loquacious companion, his conversation being principally confined to agricultural statistics. His manners were cold and distant, and his character though far from haughty or austere was sufficiently expressive of his descent", Cross recalled

His had been an interesting life. He was born the second son of the third Duke of Portland, twice Prime Minister and one of the greatest landowners in England. The Duke was always in debt and things had got so bad that at one time his servants' pay was several years in arrears. It had only been the death of his mother that had saved him from bankruptcy.

This had impacted on Lord William who was adamant that it was absolutely necessary that he should make a sufficient fortune. His father bought him a commission in the Coldstream Guards and William fought in Italy. Then the Duke used his influence to have him appointed Governor of Madras in 1803. It was not a job he cherished but he saw it as a way to make money. Sadly it was not to be his fortune for he was recalled in 1807 following a mutiny of Indian troops.

Then he decided to speculate in the rich silt Marshland between Wisbech and King's Lynn, becoming one of several peers courtiers and others who adventured their capital in that area causing prices of land to double. Lord William bought North Lynn, an estate of 914 acres on the west bank of the Ouse facing King's Lynn to which he added a cottage and windmill at Terrington St Clements. Having made a good marriage to a daughter of the Earl of Gosford he brought his new wife to stay at their new estate for six weeks. It was not a success and she never stayed so long again. But he visited regularly for a couple of days or so at a time, often travelling on the 'Union'.

Sadly he'd bought at the top of the market during the wartime boom and borrowed heavily to do so. Then he put in improvements at a time of falling prices and agricultural distress. So

instead of money flowing in money drained away until he was in several difficulties. His biggest local venture was the construction of a mill for the commercial manufacture of cattle cake and oil. He bought a second-hand steam engine to work it, only for it to be wrecked when making its way to Lynn by sea. Then there had been floods which had seen a large brig lying in the middle of a wheat field in Terrington Marsh in 1820.

His Lordship kept up with changing agricultural practices, such as clay burning or Swedish turnip cultivation, maintaining detailed records of the number of men employed and just what they were doing. But he had to employ stewards and struggled to break even while the interest on the money he'd borrowed from Gurney's bank was building up. He tried to sell his London house and North Lynn assets, but nobody wanted to buy. Instead he himself bought extra land and borrowed more money from one bank to pay off another. However his credit was good: he was the Member of Parliament for Lynn and involved in various projects such as the Eau Brink scheme, the proposal to pull down Denver Sluice and plans for a bridge across the Nene at Cross Keys. Then he came up with proposals for a massive reclamation scheme in the Wash: by bringing all the rivers into one channel it would win some 200,000 acres from the sea – a new county of most valuable land. However the scheme stagnated as his Lordship's cash evaporated

Instead he went back to India where he became the first Governor General and made many changes to that country. Even there times were often hard and at one time he tried to raise money by selling off the marble of the Taj Mahal – another grand design that failed..

However the money Bentinck sent home helped placate his creditors, several of whom were relatives or friends, and farming finally improved. In 1835 he'd returned with enough cash to settle his debts but since then he'd spent little time in the fens. Instead he'd settled in Glasgow and was promoting steam navigation to India where his reputation is much higher than it is in Norfolk

735

Stagecoach driver Thomas Cross conveyed hundreds of people between London and King's Lynn. But he had immediately recognised Thomas Hoseason when he clambered aboard the Union. They had first met when Cross was a midshipman of a man-of-war on the Indian station and Hoseason secretary to Admiral Rainier who commanded there. Like others Hoseason had amassed sufficient wealth to invest in some rich alluvial soil in the neighbourhood of Lynn and become a supporter of Lord Bentink in his various schemes.

One of these had particular interest for Cross as it opened up the prospect of yet more routes for the coach company to expand into. This was the plan to construct an embankment to replace the long and dangerous shallow ford between Lynn and Boston. One bridge had already been constructed over the lower end of the new Eau Brink, another had been made across the Welland at Fossdyke Wash so that it was only necessary to make another across the Nene estuary at Cross Keys to complete this desirable line of communication.

A company had been formed for this purpose with Lord William Bentinck as the head and several investors, including Hoseason, were happy to take out shares at £100 apiece. The success of the enterprise depended on the engineer commissioned to carry it out. There was one obvious choice: John Rennie, a man with many projects to his name. It was an area Rennie knew well for his father had been nearly drowned there some years earlier; when crossing in his carriage he'd been overtaken by the tide narrowly avoiding the fate that had befallen King John's baggage train centuries before.

One such major engineering project would be daunting but Rennie was also involved in another. Wisbech port depended on access to the sea but the outfall that meandered north had become silted up as it crossed the marshes where the tides washed up sand. This natural process was being copied by farmers warping their fields: flooding the lands one or two feet deep and allowing the water to remain until all the suspended mud had dropped to the bottom before draining them again, thus gaining several inches of new soil.

It added to the problems of the merchants of Wisbech who had tried various methods to force their boats out to sea. All had so far failed and now the navigation was totally destroyed for large shipping with only small craft and lighters being able to make the journey. They too had commissioned John Rennie to report on the problem. His solution had been to excavate a new tidal channel to the sea through the light incoherent sand which was liable to be moved by the flux and reflux of the tide. This he took advantage of: the new river was dug to only half the depth required then the old course of the Nene was dammed up. When its waters were released into the new channel they deepened it eleven feet more thus improving both the navigation and the drainage. Since then ships of 400 tons have taken the place of shallow barges in the Nene, the trade of Wisbech has been increased from 50,000 to nearly 120,000 tons a year while 1500 acres of the old estuary have recovered from the sea.

But the Nene Outfall Commissioners had insisted that the new bridge over their new Cut should be built at the same time. Rennie told them was very unwise for as it was to be built of wood, with a drawbridge opening in the centre to allow vessels to pass, it would be impossible to drive the great piles for the piers sufficiently deep. It would be better to wait until the outfall had been scoured to its full depth and then build the bridge, he urged. But Rennie's opinion was overruled.

It had proved an expensive mistake. As he anticipated the flow and ebb of the tide scooped out large holes above and below the bridge and large quantities of stone had to be stacked alongside the piles to prevent them washing away. This in turn obstructed the current through the bridge which greatly impeded the navigation. Eventually the Nene Outfall Commissioners had to get another Act to make a new bridge at their expense. All this might have been avoided if the bridge had been built as Rennie originally recommended.

736

Although John Rennie had initiated tremendous changes in the area around Kings Lynn he had not been successful in persuading folk of the benefit of steam drainage. Indeed he could only prevail on the proprietors of one district to erect a small engine to supplement their windmills; consequently it did not have a fair trial and here the matter had rested for many years.

The man who had taken up the challenge was Joseph Glynn, a civil engineer from Butterley in Derbyshire who had recently shared his experiences in the Farmers Magazine for February 1838. Although much had been done to improve the outfalls of the rivers and promote natural drainage many fen districts remained little better than waste swamps, affording only a precarious summer pasturage for cattle.

The introduction of the wind-engines, or Dutch mills, had enabled the fen farmers to throw off a large portion of the water and kept them dry enough so that in favourable seasons they reaped abundant harvests. But this was subject to great risks. Often when the crops were almost ready for the sickle, the rain fell in torrents and there was not a breath of wind to turn the mills which stood motionless whilst the farmer watched the produce of his fields perish on the ground.

The fens, Glynn had argued were an ideal area for steam drainage. There were few natural springs and when the upland rivers stayed within their banks it was only the water which fell from the clouds that had to be removed. And there was little of that, for the flat eastern counties were drier than in any other part of the island, seldom exceeding twenty-six inches in depth in the year. Indeed in many months the evaporation was greater than the downfall.

At such times it was necessary to actually open the sluices and let in water from the rivers to moisten the earth and to supply the cattle, which, when steam-engines were used, could be done without fear: the power to pump it dry again was ready whenever it was wanted. Nor was it expensive for the first cost and subsequent maintenance of one powerful steam-engine was less than the building, repair and attendance on a great number of windmills it replaced

Being an engineer Glynn was able to quote figures for how long a steam engine of a given horse power working a scoop wheel with paddles of the appropriate length would take to raise a specific number of cubic feet of water to a particular height and how much Newcastle coal it would take to do it. Not that many understood a word of it.

Glynn had tested his theories in Deeping Fen, near Spalding, where two steam-engines had replaced forty-four windmills. He then drained two districts in West Fen March in 1826 followed by Soham Middle Fen and the Waterbeach Level in 1832. He'd just completed Feltwell Fen and hoped soon to have finished the drainage of Soham Mere. He was most proud of his achievement in Binnimnor Fen near March whose commissioners had instructed him to spare no pains to drain it. Now 2700 acres of that land were kept in the finest possible state of drainage by a thirty horse power steam engine.

But his greatest challenge had been an engine erected on the bank of the Hundred Foot at Little Downham. The first problem was one that was common throughout the fen: that of securing a firm foundation. He'd had to drive 600 strong piles through twenty-one feet of black peat into the clay beneath before boarding it to form a floor under the whole of building so that if any settlement took place it would all sink equally.

Then he had to devise a way of pumping out into a river that varied in height dependent on the state of the tide, sometimes being sixteen feet higher than at others. His solution was to install two scoop wheels of different sizes so that the engineer could switch from one to the other depending on the conditions.

Before these works had been completed many who professed to understand such matters had predicted their total failure. However through the aid of the steam-engine this same land, once properly drained and cultivated had become of national importance. Hundreds of acres of rich black earth formed of decomposed vegetable matter upwards of 30 feet in depth had been created from what had been watery wasteland, amply rewarding the men who had risked their capital in the venture.

737

For anybody wishing to explore the area around King's Lynn there was one essential guide, 'The Norfolk Tour or traveller's pocket-companion' by Richard Beatniffe.

Beatniffe had started as an apprenticed to an eminent bookseller in Lynn named Thomas Hollingworth who had been in business forty years. He also sold musical instruments, fishing tackle and shaving brushes and always took four apprentices at a time – with such a wide

range of items he had a lot to teach them. But each apprentice had either ran away to sea or enlisted. This was not surprising for not only were they were dieted in the most economical manner but they were all obliged to sleep in one bed, the sheets of which were only changed once a year. The shock of the clean sheets was something they had difficulty in adjusting to!

Like the others Beatniffe had rebelled against such treatment and complained to his uncle, the Rector of the nearby parish of Gaywood. But the Reverend had ordered him to see it through. Having survived his apprenticeship, Richard had a surprise reward: Hollingworth offered him the hand of his daughter in marriage. But as she was somewhat deformed Richard declined the match and sought his fortune as a journeyman bookseller in Norwich. However his old master did not bare a grudge and later lent him £500 to commence business on his own account.

There he built up a stock of scarce and valuable works which he advertised to the world though regular catalogues. Immediately on publication London booksellers sent him orders for many of the volumes, none of which he ever fulfilled. For Beatniffe preferred to sell his books to gentlemen and would increase the price so as to render the purchase most improbable if he suspected a customer of not being one. When a Scottish nobleman called at his shop to buy a Bible he was horrified at the price demanded. ‘Och, man! I could buy it for much less at Edinburgh', he protested. 'Then, my lord you must go to Edinburgh for it!’ replied the blunt bookseller showing him the door. Not surprisingly he amassed a valuable stock of unsold volumes which were disposed of by auction just after his death in 1818.

Rather than selling books, Beatniffe read them and he used the information gleaned to write more. Inevitably ‘The Norfolk Tour’ had been overtaken by time for whilst landscapes seldom changed, places did. Take the quiet villages of Castle Rising. It had once been the greatest port in Norfolk, next to Yarmouth: ‘Rising was a sea-port town, When Lynn it was a marsh’, people still chanted. But the harbour had choked up and now the only things worthy of any comment were the crumbing remains of an ancient castle surrounded by a ditch undermined by rabbits and two almshouses, one for twelve poor men and the other for twenty-four widows

Rising had been a Borough governed by a mayor, recorder, high steward, twelve aldermen, a speaker and fifty burgesses. It is now an exceedingly unimportant place with hardly enough residents to fill up all the former offices. Even by 1809 the Corporation consisted of just two aldermen, who alternately served the office of Mayor. Once a Government messenger had arrived with a despatch and instructions to deliver it to the Mayor of Rising personally. On making inquiries he was directed to a thatcher high up on the top of a house. The official reasonably doubted for a while the correctness of this information but, on repeated assurances that the thatcher and the mayor were identical, he handed in his paper. The head of the municipality took it and, in endeavouring to find out what it meant, held it bottom upwards. The official interfering, suggested that it had better be turned. 'Turned!' said the thatcher: 'don't you know, sir, that the Mayor of Rising can read any way he likes?'

There were six names on the poll-books, though it was questionable whether, except for the rector of the parish, there was a single legal voter. Yet until passing of the Reform Bill it elected two members to parliament, latterly Lord Henry Cholmondeley of Houghton Hall and the Honourable Fulk Greville Howard, Earl of Rocksavage. He’d been an Upton before he’d married into the Howard family, one-time owners of the castle Rising when it was more than a ruin. Lord Henry had tried to regain a seat, standing as MP for East Norfolk in 1832 but had come bottom of the poll. A few years earlier he could have sold the second Rising seat to whoever who came up with the asking price of £4,000. Things had indeed changed in recent years!

One thing that was important for stagecoachmen was the state of the roads. Those in Norfolk were comparatively good because of the plentiful supply of gravel and clunch which, under the weight of numerous wheels formed roads nearly as good as those of Macadam. It had not always been so: Cross knew of a not very old man, who remembered that when he was a boy nothing less than four horses could pull a carriage from Wisbech to Lynn, about fourteen miles, in a day; and that two extra horses had to be harnessed to get the coach to the county boundary, Wisbech being just in Cambridgeshire.

Another factor was the amount of other traffic on the road. And in autumn each year that soared as hundreds of cows made their way to a small village near Norwich. They kicked up the dust and blocked the roads causing almost as much disruption as the men who were supposed to be controlling them. These were a breed unto themselves, dressed in a strange garb out and spoke a language none could understand. They were feared, distrusted yet an essential part of many people's livelihood.

For they were Scottish men driving Galloway cattle destined for Smithfield market. It was a very difficult operation. First a herd of animals had to be gathered together from twenty or thirty farmers by a man who had no money to buy such valuable beasts and no guarantee to offer to their owners other than his word that he would pay them when he returned to Scotland. It was a heavy responsibility involving a great deal of trust on each side.

Then he needed a team of drovers, about one to each thirty head of cattle for a three-week journey. These varied from men who had grown grey in the service to the merest children and others so premature in their manhood and small to boot, that their baby days must have been denied them. All managed to get themselves and their garments besmeared with red ochre in their efforts to mark the various lots. In the main Scottish drovers were good-natured fellows and disposed to be civil and obliging. But occasional squabbles are unavoidable where so many are herded together in the public houses along the route and there had been a major battle with locals at the fair at Hempton just a few years ago, Cross recalled

Between two and three hundred head of cattle set off down the Great North Road. It was a long, slow progress, the drovers constantly on guard against animals straying into roadside fields in search of fresh fodder – they had no dogs to do the chasing and had to do it themselves. Ahead travelled the topman seeking out good grassy fields for them to rest and feed each night, paying as little as he could for the grazing. There was money too for village blacksmiths who became adept at shoeing foot-sore cows in the same way they did horses. Inevitably there were casualties on the road. Any dead animals were supposed to be notified to the constable or churchwarden of the parish, then skinned and buried with the hide slashed to minimise the risk of any reoccurrence of the distemper which ravaged the herds a few years previous. But all too often the hides are sold to tanners without questions being asked, Cross confided.

Whilst many trudge all the way down to St Ives others turn off near Tadcaster and wend their way through Selby and Gainsborough, resting on Sunday near Lincoln where the magistrates choose to uphold the law about not working on the Sabbath. They continue to Sleaford, Spalding and on though Whaplode Drove, Holbeach Drove, Parson Drove and Tholomas Drove before reaching Setchey. There had been a fortnightly cattle market there until a few years ago, now relocated to King's Lynn. But the majority of the Scottish cattle continue across Norfolk through Swaffham and Dereham to a little village called St Faith's near Norwich which holds one of the largest cattle fairs in the country on the 17th of October.

Now the ordeal of the topman and his drovers really begins. Having made the long, long trek, would the Norfolk farmers be prepared to pay for the foot-sore, exhausted animals that were filling their field. The Scotsmen were entirely at their mercy: they could not drive their animals all the way back home, and the London Smithfield market was many miles distant. Should the markets be low he had to sell at a loss and be ruined. Having concluded what bargain they could the men could relax for a short time before making the long trudge back to Galloway, their journey made the more dangerous because of the money they were now carrying back to their kinsfolk. Their cattle however were only part-way to their destination

739

Tens of thousands of Scotch cattle made the long journey down from Galloway to Norfolk arriving scrawny and footsore. The were a complete contrast to the bloated animals bred by the local gentry which were fed on oil-cake and corn until they became so fat and greasy, that no stomach but that of a Cherokee or a Bosjesman Hottentot could digest the meat.

Thomas William Coke was now one of the wealthiest men in England and had just been honoured by the new Queen, Victoria. But when he'd inherited the Holkham estate about 50 years ago the land had been so poor and unproductive that much of it was not worth five shillings an acre. Indeed a large tract had been let tithe-free at three shillings an acre. When the lease expired Mr Coke had offered the tenant the chance to continue but the farmer did not have the courage to accept even at a reduced rent. Instead Coke had planted upwards of two thousand acres of land with woods, the annual thinnings and trimmings of which far exceed the original rental of the whole estate.

In those not-so-distant days the whole tract of country round Lynn was a rabbit and rye county; indeed Coke said he'd seen two rabbits quarrelling for one blade of grass. Not an ear of wheat was to be seen and it was scarcely believed that an ear could be made to grow. But now that barren soil was producing most abundant crops of wheat and barley - enough to feed both Norfolk and much of London. And it was all down to the turnip

Thomas Cross summarised the situation. Without winter-food little stock could be kept, without stock there could be little manure and with little manure there could not be much of anything else. But the second Viscount Townshend grew turnips on his farm at Raynham which he fed to sheep, the sheep produced large dung-heaps and the dung was spread to increase the production of turnips. Then while the sheep grazed their feet trod the loose soil which compacted it and improved fertility. Then as the ground became cleaned and enriched by the root crops it yielded abundant harvests until now wheat and barley wave over the entire district. Thus through the agency of turnips, a full fold and a full bullock-yard made a full granary.

But there is also abundant grazing. So Norfolk farmers buy Scottish cattle which they keep for several months on their pastures and river-banks, feeding them principally on turnips - and deriving no trifling profit from the manure which they yield - till the animals ready for slaughter. Then in the spring and early part of the summer, the beasts set off on another drove, this time heading for the markets at Smithfield very much fatter than when they had left Galloway.

They're driven by Norfolk drovers like Henry Edrich and his son William - Henry always travels in a pony cart, Will and the others walk with the animals. They feed the cows hay for some days before they start in order to lighten their bowels for ease on the journey. At first the animals get excited at being on the road again, they'll romp and skip about which may

cause a hoof to be thrown off, a horn to be broken, a tendon to be sprained, ribs to be bruised, a shoulder to be shaken to jelly or the body to be inordinately heated so tallow within melts.

Henry is not one to hurry. This journey is conducted at a country pace and while it took three weeks from Scotland to Norfolk, it takes another fourteen days to get to Smithfield. They move particularly slowly for the two first days, not exceeding seven or eight miles, but then they will settle down and can travel from fifteen or sixteen miles daily provided both the road and weather are favourable.

On the way the cows are fed at a considerable expense with the best food, for a beast when taken away from his turnips develops rather a fastidious appetite which travelling in his fat state does not tend to improve and so can rapidly decrease in weight. As journey's end nears they have extra hours shelter and fodder. The cost is in part deferred by allowing the field owner to milk the cows which gives them a chance to carefully inspect the animals, information they pass on to the Smithfield buyers.

I have been told by some of the farmers, that every fat bullock they send to London, costs them in this way, not less than three guineas — and one of the jolly tenants of the Holkham estates, assured me that he has often, upon following his bullocks to London, when shewn them in Smithfield market, doubted their identity, so completely were they altered in appearance.

740

For drovers of sheep and cattle the final stretch of the journey through the wide green, increasingly muddy lanes that led towards Smithfield market could be fraught with danger. Whilst most feared thieves who stole their property, drovers had another problem – that of thieves who having already stolen sheep or cattle quietly added those animals to the hundreds they were driving. With beasts being collected from farmers along the route it was easy to miss the odd extra sheep during the course of a long journey. Then as they reached town there were persons ready to separate the stolen animals which they passed on to certain master-butchers who were in the secret and consequently obtained them much cheaper than at the usual market-price.

One solution being considered was that of issuing passes signed by a magistrate describing the number and mark of each animal. These would be checked at each turnpike gate they were unable to avoid. But this would involve a great deal of paperwork and expense and would not eradicate the problem of dishonest drovers.

Thomas Cross had learned something of the problems from Bernard McNamee who'd journeyed on the Union stagecoach back home to Lincolnshire. He was one of several drovers employed by Benjamin Sowerby, a dealer from near Brigg, who sold about a thousand sheep a month. He made sure the animals arrived on time at fairs and markets in Stamford, Boston, Lincoln and elsewhere then arranged for one of his men to take those sold on to the butchers who bought them – a job performed in Cambridge by John Brown and his brother.

Getting stock to market was one thing, selling them quite another. After Peterborough fair in July 1831 there had been still 76 sheep left so Sowerby had come to the Blackmoor's head where he and his brother Hugh had been lodging and given orders to take them to Norwich. They managed to sell some on the way at Wisbech but were still left with two dozen when St Faith's fair was over which then had to be driven back to King's Lynn for a fourth try.

McNamee was trusted to get the best price he could. After he'd been left with animals following Weighton market Sowerby had instructed him to take them to Maldon fair, telling

him to ask twenty-three shillings each for the ewes (but and if he could get a sovereign to take it) and to offer the lambs at nine shillings and sixpence each but be prepared to accept one bob. Sowerby said that if in a fortnight he could sell a thousand, it would bring a profit of £50. Bernard noted any sales in his pocket book and accounted for them when he finally returned home.

All had gone well until April 1832 when he'd been hired to take one hundred and sixty-nine sheep to Grantham fair. By the time they arrived five had gone lame and been sold off on the road - that was quite a common thing. Well they only sold forty-four at the fair and Sowerby gave instructions to take the remaining animals into Smithfield market. John Bell, a cattle dealer, warned there would be little time to get to London; it would be better to turn off the North Road three miles towards Biggleswade and perhaps sell some of them to the Hitchin butchers, then call on Simkin of Hatfield as he was likely to take some. The sheep were in poor condition and getting worse with some dying every day, but of one thing Sowerby was clear – he was not to return until they'd all been sold.

Bernard had told what happened next: "I got as far as Bourne when I met a chap named John Skelton who said he was interested in buying them. Now it was up to me to get the best price so I asked twenty-eight shillings a-piece. He said that was a great deal too much but if I could set them at a sovereign he would do a deal. I came down to twenty-six bob but he then dropped his offer to sixteen. So I put them in a field and went to an inn for the night. Next morning he was waiting for me outside the door when I got up at half-past four. He said 'What do you say about these sheep:' I said 'What I told you last night'. I endeavoured to get as much for them as I could, and he tried to buy them as cheap as he could. Mind you he had an advantage over me – it had been dark when I'd arrived the previous night and I didn't known where the field was that I'd left them. It wanted about a quarter to five o'clock on Sunday when we concluded the bargain and he paid £94 18s – which given their condition was not a bad price. I'd got rid of them and didn't have the hassle of going down to London".

But there's one thing Bernard had forgotten – he was supposed to meet Benjamin Sowerby at the Spread Eagle in Gracechurch Street on the Sunday afternoon. It was an oversight that saw him appear in court at the Old Bailey.

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Drover Bernard McNamee told Cross how having sold the sheep he'd been driving down to Smithfield Market on the road before he'd got there, he'd made his way to Colchester where he booked a passage on a sailing packet to Hull. From there he could take a boat to within a few miles of Brigg, home of the man who'd entrusted the animals to him. The two trips by water would cost him about ten shillings, a considerable saving on the stagecoach fair of more than two pounds.

Every penny counted, for Benjamin Sowerby was not a man to pay much in expenses. He allowed his drovers three shillings a day when on the road and that was seldom enough. Bernard was owed over £29 and had intended to demand this to be paid out of the nearly £100 in gold, silver and bank notes that he was taking to him.

But while he was waiting for the boat at a lodging house for travellers he had been detained by the sergeant-at-mace, taken before the Colchester Mayor, thrown into gaol and ended up in the dock at the Old Bailey.

There he was confronted by his employer, Sowerby, who had told the court a different tale. He stated that he'd travelled down to the Spread Eagle in Gracechurch Street where he'd expected to meet up with his drover. The when he McNamee did not show, he'd got a lad to show him the way to Smithfield.

It was a sight that had surprised him: the streets for hundreds of feet around were overflowing with live stock while the market itself which held about 4100 oxen and 30,000 sheep, as well as calves and pigs, was crammed. There was the barking of dogs, the bellowing of cattle, the cursing of men, and the dull blows of sticks—a charivari of sound he'd never experienced before in any of the country markets he attended. By the dim red light of hundreds of torches he'd glimpsed a writhing party-coloured mass, surmounted by twisting horns, some in rows tied to rails, some gathered together in one struggling knot. Nowhere did he spot his missing drovers amongst the men goading their animals from place to place

Then the lad led him to a couple of acres of living wool. The sheep, squeezed into hurdles like figs into a drum were lying down upon each other in a scene which had more of the appearance of a hideous nightmare than a weekly exhibition in a civilised country. Amongst them all he found his missing animals – he knew them because of the secret mark that each sheep carried. They were in the hands of different salesmen, all of whom claimed to have bought them from a dealer named John Skelton. He was the man who'd bought them from McNamee at Bourne and had finished the journey to London with them.

Sowerby claimed them all back and put them with four different salesmen. They were worth, at his calculation about twenty-four shilling each but he got only half that much – nobody would buy them because they knew there was a dispute and that they would end up in court giving evidence.

It the witness box Sowerby testified that he'd never given McNamee permission to sell any of his animals – there should always be somebody else with him to take the money. But various drovers told a different tale. John Boy had travelled all the way down from Yorkshire to say how he'd seen Bernard pocket the money at Lincoln and Stamford fairs, even though Sowerby was in the town at the time. McNamee had two more witnesses, but never saw them after they were seen talking to Sowerby at the corn fair. "I had worked for him two years, and though he knew I was starving, he would not give me money to subpoena witnesses and get counsel but I'm sure he bribed those men to stay away from court", he'd complained.

However Hugh McNamee, his brother, had come to court to testify how Sowerby refused to settle up for his expenses and how they'd decided never to dirt their hands with his work again till he did.

Then Bernard had sprung his surprise. "I always kept a book where I wrote down every penny I spent and every shilling I took – I showed it to the judge and he could see what Sowerby said was a lie". Despite this the jury found him guilty of theft but agreed that he did not intend to steal the sheep at the time he'd received them. The judge had respited the sentence and with luck this would be the last he heard of the matter. But he'd probably never be going to London with a drove again. Now that more and more railways were being constructed animals could be sent by cattle wagons in much less time, arriving in much better condition and for nearly the same price as it cost to walk them all the way.

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It was not just sheep and cattle that checked Thomas Cross's progress. The King's Lynn Union statgecoach was often hindered by hundreds of geese being driven down to Leadenhall market. He saw, heard and smelled the same flock several times as he journeyed up and down, for the birds only travelled about eight miles a day with their feet dipped in tar to harden them for the journey

The first time he'd met one such mass of noisy feathers it was being driven by a boy with a bit of red rag at the end of a long stick. It seemed as if he'd be delayed for hours. But the lad

just told him to keep his horses quiet, let out a 'Sh-sh-ee-ayi-ayi' and waved his stick here and there. In a minute or two the flock opened, wheeling to the left and right in regular columns to make a passage through which the coach had passed.

Large numbers of tame geese were kept in the fenny watery parts of Lincolnshire and many persons kept a thousand birds. The female lays from seven to a dozen eggs which she sits on for about a month when she requires attention every day. During the breeding season geese are lodged in the house with the farmer, even in their very bedrooms, in three rows of wicker pens placed one above another. Each bird has its own separate lodge divided from the others, which it keeps possession of during the time of sitting. Twice a day they are driven to water, then brought back to their homes where those on the upper rooms are carried individually up to their pens.

When the young goslings are but a few days old, they are all, with their mothers, driven down to the water, where they find plentiful provision. One with another, each goose brings up six or seven young ones, so that the increase in numbers is very rapid. They are also very profitable

The geese are plucked five times a year; the first is at Lady-day and is the most important: it is the only time in a year that their wings can be plucked for the quill feathers for which there is an increasing demand from writers.

The feathers are used for bedding. In the moulting season they spontaneously fall off but at other times other times they're pulled out. The old geese get used to it but the young ones are very noisy and unruly. Even goslings six weeks old are not spared – their tails are plucked to get them used early to what they are to come to. If the season proves cold dozens of birds die from exposure and sometimes their skin and flesh is so torn that the birds die anyway. Even when the fowls are plucked in the most careful manner they lose their flesh and appetite, their eyes become dull and they languish in a most pitiable state.

Then there's the demand at Christmas. While there's nothing more delicate than a young well-fed goose there's nothing more rank and detestable than the old tough bird, quickly fatted, that constitutes most of those which found at a poulterer's. It is quite a mistake to suppose that a Christmas goose *must* be coarse and strong. If you want a treat at Christmas without the trouble of hatching a brood, you should buy the birds half grown, at the beginning of autumn. You don't need a pond just a deep pan or trough supplied with fresh water. Turn them out on a common or waste piece of grass – but not where horses graze because they do not mix. Then for the last fortnight you must pen them up during the day and drive them under shelter at night. You should give them three feeds a day, one of barley-meal, one of dry barley and the third of oats. As they are social birds, they will not thrive alone, two or more must be fatted together, or they will pine and lose flesh rapidly.

However you need to be on your watch – this is the time thieves will strike, cautioned Smith: "I know a farmer who lost eight geese out of a flock and sent his man down to the market to seek them out. He saw birds that he was sure were his, but how was he to prove it – there were no markings to identify them. But the thief had left one goose behind. So he brought back the others and put them down in the farmyard. They came straight away to the back door where they were fed. Then he brought in the other bird and they knew each other - if you put geese to a strange one they will fight – but these went under the gate together, into another yard, cackling happily. That was enough to see the thief convicted by the magistrate"

Problems with geese could affect the most surprising people, not the least of whom was a young graduate Jewish curate of an English country parish.

Solomon Gompertz had been born in Devon to a Jewish family but decided to become a Church of England clergyman after being baptised by Archdeacon of Exeter. He entered Peterhouse as a pensioner in January 1824 but switched to St John's College half-way through his studies before being ordained as a priest in May 1830.

He had been appointed curate to the curious church of Hartwell in Buckinghamshire close by the grand Hartwell House. Its owner was Sir John Lee who, like Solomon, had attended St John's College, albeit under his former name of John Fiott. Since then he had travelled extensively, amassing a considerable collection of antiquities which he added to the treasures in his newly inherited mansion.

The story of the Jacobean hall was worthy of telling. Between 1809 and 1814 it had been occupied by the exiled French King, Louis XVIII. During that time the previously spacious and well-furnished apartments with their extensive collection of old-master paintings had been extensively altered to cater for the numerous attendants on his French majesty. All the outhouses had been converted into bedchambers for some 140 people who had previously occupied some of the most splendid situations in France. As their exile continued and their purses became drained they had been forced to sell off their valuables to fund their straightened lifestyles.

Louis himself received an allowance from the British Government of some £20,000 a year and had managed to live not-too-uncomfortably. He'd been visited by various foreign visitors including former King Gustavus of Sweden, with locals marvelling at the sight of the two exiles perambulating the grounds, lamenting past glories.

It was whilst resident at Hartwell that his Queen died and from there that her remains were conveyed to a temporary resting-place in Westminster Abbey before being returned to the mausoleum of the Royal Family in France. Only as the prospect of Louis' own return to his realm became assured did he start to reassume the state of a monarch, organising great dinners in the fashion of the French court. Then when he left to reclaim his Kingdom he had been given a triumphal departure, being escorted from his rented home by a grand cavalcade.

All this had been a mixed blessing for the House's owner, Sir George Lee, who'd received a good rent for his mansion. Just before he departed Louis had invited Sir George to visit him at the Tuileries. It had been some time before he took up that invitation, arrived at Paris and solicited a private audience with his Majesty. Sadly he had chosen a bad moment as news had just broken that Napoleon Bonaparte had escaped from Elba and was once more on the warpath. Louis was far too busy bustling to quit his palace at a moment's warning and preparing to flee once more.

Now Sir George had died and Sir John had inherited, changing his surname in the process. He'd also taken himself a bride to worship with him in the octagonal church close by his new mansion, the church where Solomon was curate.

The wedding of a former confirmed bachelor at the advanced age of 50 had caused some discussions in society but Solomon had more profound doubts about the Church of England marriage ceremony - at least two-thirds of which was usually omitted. The whole thing should be revised or the solemnization of matrimony would lapse into an ordinary celebration of a civil contract which could as well be dispensed by a magistrate.

The Reverend Solomon Gompertz, newly graduated from St John's College, had been offered a new curacy at the village of Harlington in Middlesex. He was awarded a stipend of £100 a year and had use of a Glebe House for two years until he was forced to leave. He moved to a similar position at Little Bromley in Essex where he worked with Rector Thomas Newman a man whose life was rocked by the death of two of his sisters within three days in Dec 1834

Solomon decided to return back to Harlington. But to do so he needed to obtain a licence from the Bishop of London. His Lordship had occasion to remember the Jewish-born cleric who had written to him earlier in his ministry criticising fundamental aspects of church doctrine. This time the Bishop refused to endorse the Rev Gompertz, claiming there had been various complaints about him and that he could not be considered until these had been investigated. But he declined to divulge either the nature of the complaints or the names of those who had made them, arguing that to do so would be to discourage reporting of poor priests.

Rather than be investigated by the church, Solomon instituted judicial proceedings for libel in a court of law thus forcing the Bishop to disclose the names of the accusers and their concerns.

There were six allegations. One was that he had lost the respect of his parish to such an extent that nobody would countenance his return, indeed he had so little regard for the truth that nobody would now believe a word he said. Under questioning one of the complainants was asked to explain what was meant by 'veracity'. 'Goodness to the poor' he'd replied, causing merriment in court.

The Curate had misappropriated money left for the parish poor, they claimed. There was a school in the parish at which the children of the poorer classes were instructed. It was short of books and in order to obtain them at a cheap rate it was necessary for them to subscribe to the Society for the Diffusion of Christian Knowledge. A Mr Brown had promised to give a guinea for this purpose but the Curate had pocketed it. Solomon showed this was only half-true: as the matter was urgent he'd sent a guinea of his own until Brown's contribution had been received.

Then there was a charge of improper behaviour with a young boy. When leaving the parish he had induced a lad in the service of another person to go with him without giving proper notice to his previous employer. Gompertz replied that he'd had announced that when he left he would take the best-behaved boy in the school with him. That boy had been a weekly servant who had squabbled with his master and whose mother was happy for him to go with the curate. The boy's clothes had been got ready and preparations made for his departure with no attempt to keep the matter secret. As for allegations that his farewell sermons had contained personal allusions of an offensive nature, Solomon showed it had been preached on the subject of brotherly love and there was nothing not inconsistent with the doctrines of a Christian preacher.

But the main complaint was that he had violated the Sabbath-Day by buying and driving a flock of geese through the parish on a Sunday. In answer to this Solomon had support from his attorney: they had been walking along the road on a Sunday afternoon when they met a person driving six geese, the remainder of a flock. The man had asked Solomon to buy them but he'd replied that he would not do so on a Sunday but if the man would come to his house next day he would talk to him about it. At this the goose-driver immediately delivered the birds to the Glebe house telling the servant that the Curate had purchased them and demanding immediate payments. Unwittingly the girl had obliged.

The charges were dismissed, the jury awarded Solomon £200 damages and John Weston, Joseph Sparks, John Hunt, William Turner, William Mallings and Daniel Sharp paid for a personal apology to appear in the columns of a local newspaper.

But despite this the Bishop expressed no remorse for persecuting an innocent man on a false charge. He still declared his intention to refuse Gompertz a licence, even though without such licence, or testimonial, from him, no other bishop would license him for any other parish. There were still battles for Solomon to fight if he were to continue his career in the Church of England. At least he had the services of an eminent lawyer to support his cause.

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The Rev Solomon Gompertz had won his fight to keep his fledgling clerical career alive with the help of one of the most famous of legal advocates, Sergeant Charles Bompas. This was a man of whom Pickwick had personal experience during his own courtroom battle with Mrs Bardell. But of this he chose to make no mention as his companions in the Little Rose contrived not to notice.

Bompas was a young, tall, large, popular man who'd originally practised at Bristol. Then, not deeming that place sufficiently large to afford full scope to his professional talents and enterprise, he'd moved up to London and entered the Court of Common Pleas. There Mr. Sergeant Wilde had been of great service to him in bringing him forward at Westminster Hall and recommending him in cases that he chose not to undertake himself.

As Pickwick could have testified, had he so wished, there was a something of coarseness about Bompas' manner of conducting a case. But he was a first-rate talker with a pleasant voice, never at a loss for words and always ready at a moment's notice to speak, no matter on what professional subject. He often repeated himself but did so designedly, in order that the points in his argument which he deemed the most important might be made as clear to the minds of the jury as they were to his own. And impenetrable indeed must be the heads of the jury if he did not succeed in hammering into them the points to which he attached the greatest importance.

Having defended one young Cambridge cleric who had caused great controversy in religious circles, Bompas had recently been involved in a case over an other, a man far more feared by church leaders than Solomon. His name was the Reverend Robert Taylor and he had been dubbed "The Devil's Chaplain"

The details had been somewhat squalid – and thus made for good telling. It was an action for breach of promise of marriage brought by Miss Georgina Richards, a stay-maker of Bristol. In March 1831 she had been asked to become housekeeper of a somewhat notorious Mr Carlile the proprietor of the Rotunda in Blackfriars Road, London. Once housing the Surrey Institution it had been used as a wine and concert room, had housed wax works and wild beast shows and was then a religious meeting house where the Reverend Robert Taylor preached to between 400 and 500 people twice a week. Within a month the stay-maker and the Reverend had fallen in love and he'd promised to take her as his wife. There was just one problem over fixing the date: he was being prosecuted for blasphemy.

For Taylor, like Gompertz, had been challenging established church thinking. Like him, he had studied at St John's college during which time he'd attended Holy Trinity Church to hear Charles Simeon preach. Minister and student had became so well acquainted that when the Rector of Midhurst, Sussex had asked Simeon to nominate the most religious young man at the University to act as his curate, he'd had no hesitation in recommending Robert.

In the next five years the young Cambridge graduate developed into a zealous and highly evangelical preacher. Indeed he so impressed his listeners that he'd obtained an appointment to a brown coat rectory – a living in which the patron pocketed the extensive income and paid a black-coated curate twenty pounds a year for his occasional services.

Things were going well until Taylor made the acquaintance of a Midhurst tradesman who introduced him to unorthodox views, causing him to challenge certain fundamentals of his Christian teaching. One Sunday he expressed those doubts from the pulpit, giving offence to the more traditional members of his congregation. Like Gompertz the curate had written to his Bishop expressing his disquiet about preaching what he had ceased to believe and tending his resignation

However the Bishop had remonstrated with him on the folly of relinquishing his prospects in the church just because he'd ceased to think with the orthodox - saying he would not have ordained him if he could have imagined that he, Mr. Taylor, would have turned out such a fool as to entertain such silly scruples. The young cleric was swayed and began to feel an inclination to remain in the Established Church after all. But some atonement was deemed necessary, some recantation of the infidel principals must be made and it was agreed he would retire from Sussex, be secluded for a time and be brought out again in the first good living the Bishop could find him. But it was not to work out that way.

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The young Reverend Robert Taylor had established a reputation as an evangelistic preacher soon after leaving St John's College, but then he had questioned his faith. Even though he quickly regained his orthodox views his Bishop had suggested he take a break from the pulpit for a while. This so upset the lad's widowed mother, a very religious woman who prided herself in having so promising a son in the Church, that it brought her to a bed of sickness from which she gave no sign of ever rising again

In an agony of mental conflict Taylor was ready to recant, to avow, or to publish anything that should be called for. He wrote to the Bishop of London begging to be allowed back to the bosom of his church but was answered in a most sarcastic tone. He realised there was no further prospects in the Church of England so other means of living must be sought.

Taylor sought to benefit from his degree by taking a school, only to find himself defrauded of what little money he'd managed to save. Then he sought the assistance of an old friend who smuggled him to the position of curate in a parish near Birmingham from which he was ejected when the Bishop got to hear. His time was not totally wasted for he managed to convert the congregation to his own beliefs before he was discovered. Then it was on to the Isle of Man where he eked a living by writing articles for local newspapers. All went well until he penned one justifying suicide. This so infuriated the Bishop of Sodor and Man that he threatened to have Robert thrown into gaol for life if he did not leave the island.

So five years after he'd been ordained he turned from evangelist to anti-clericalism. Taylor set up a Christian Evidence Society and began to lecture in London pubs dressed in elaborate vestments, attacking the Anglican liturgy and the barbarities of the Establishment for what he called its "Pagan creed". But this was judged to be blasphemy and he was sentenced to a year in gaol. Confined in his cell he wrote 'The Diegesis' attacking Christianity on the basis of comparative mythology and dedicating it to the Master and Fellows of St John's College. Then on release and with his book newly published he joined up with the Radical Richard Carlile.

Together they set out on an "infidel home missionary tour". On Thursday 21 May 1829 the men arrived in Cambridge where Taylor strolled round the colleges, reviving memories of his

undergraduate days. Then in the evening they attended Holy Trinity Church to hear a hell-fire sermon by the man who'd inspired so many, the Rev. Charles Simeon, only to denounce it as one of the worst imaginable for the morals of mankind.

Next day Taylor and Carlile rented lodgings for a fortnight above a print shop in Rose Crescent which became their "Infidel Head-Quarters". By noon they had sent a printed challenge to the Vice-Chancellor, the leading Doctors of Divinity, the heads of all the colleges and the Rev. Simeon inviting them to discuss the merits of the Christian religion. They claimed they could prove that such a person as Jesus Christ ever existed. The two toured the University precincts, with Taylor immaculately dressed in university cap and gown greeting old friends, giving out circulars and seeking out freethinkers.

The University was quick to respond. The Proctors interrogated the unsuspecting landlord William Smith then demanded he surrender his lodging-house licence. Smith refused to hand it over - it had been renewed only the day before and he had not violated any regulations. It was to no avail: the l
licence was revoked and the lodgings thrown out of bounds,. Notices were posted in the butteries of all the colleges warning students to have nothing to do with him

Taylor responded by putting a public notice on the door of the University Library challenging a university that punished the innocent, crushed the weak and oppressed and persecuted Smith, his wife and six children by taking away half his livelihood. It excited attention but not in the way he'd anticipated. A group of undergraduates prepared vigilante action to avenge the landlord by attacking the men who had placed him in such a position. Hearing this Taylor and Carlile apologised to the landlord, prodded the authorities to restore his licence and slipped out of town.

They were satisfied that they had uncovered about fifty young collegians who were somewhat bold in vowing Infidelity among each other, though few would break the shackles of their education. But from the pulpit of All Saint's Church, opposite the college that had nurtured him, the Rev Jenkin Jones pronounced the eternal vengeance of God on the infidels who came from the metropolis to challenge the University and pretend to dispute the truth of divine revelation. Since then Taylor had gone on to cause more controversy but had stayed well away from his old university town.

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The Cambridge religious establishment may have been rocked by young undergraduate clerics, but the world could also be changed by those who had little academic training.

During his journey up and down the road from London stagecoach driver Thomas Cross had become acquainted with one of the most distinguished counsel at the Chancery bar, Sir Edward Burtenshaw Sugden. He was the son of a barber who had practiced in a small and homely way in the neighbourhood of Lincoln's Inn and, when a lad, used to assist his father in his humble calling. But he was proof that a lowly birth did not prevent great achievement.

Through hard work and careful study he acquired a detailed knowledge of knowledge of equity principles and proceedings. He invested topics which were naturally dry with charms of no ordinary kind, even to the minds of those who knew nothing of such professional matters.

One of his main accomplishments was a very unusual command of language and the ability to respond quickly to any unexpected challenges. Those parts of his speeches which in the very nature of things could not have been premeditated had all the appearance of being most carefully prepared beforehand. His enunciation was well timed to the ear; which, with a

graceful action, had the effect of neutralizing a sort of shrillness which characterised his voice in some of his more impassioned moods.

Sir Edward was not only a fluent, but on many occasions a highly eloquent speaker. However there was a sort of waspishness about him which turned people against him. He was in the habit of treating opponents in a manner the reverse of respectful. He had a great opinion of himself. He was a genius— as a professional man —and no one knew that he was so, better than himself.

All this he put it to good account. It is doubtful whether any barrister, even in the courts of law, ever derived from his practice so large a yearly income, as did Sir Edward Sugden. There was not a single Chancery case of any importance, for many years in which he was not retained and it was rumoured that his annual average receipts from his business could not have been less than £15,000 if, indeed, they were not nearer £18,000.

Then having made his fortune he'd decided to change tack and seek a parliamentary career. It was at the election of 1832 that the opportunity presented itself when he was invited to challenge Cambridge for the Tory cause. His opponents were Spring Rice and George Pryme. Both of them were old University men. Spring Rice had held a seat in Ireland but given the problems over there was pleased to have the chance to represent a more peaceful constituency. He'd been a fellow-commoner of Trinity College during the period that Pryme was a resident fellow and they had a great deal in common. Together they were determined to see off the interloper

During the campaign Sugden used all his professional skills to deflect various challenges. One young man was determined to unsettle him. During an animated speech he shouted out 'Soap' 'Lather' and 'I want a shave'. It seemed to work, stopping Sir Edward for just a moment. Then pointing to the part of the crowd from whence the interruption came, he observed— "I am particularly obliged to that gentleman for so politely reminding me of my humble origin. It is true, that I am a barber's son, and was once a barber myself. If the gentleman who so politely reminds me of the circumstance had once been a barber, he would have continued one to the end of his life." This exceedingly happy retort was received with deafening applause by all present.

Sugden was supported by Swan, the Cambridge carrier, who painted his vans orange, the Tory party colours. This was lampooned in a cartoon headed 'An old Cambridge Swan driving his team to the poll' with the verse

Oh! Dear little Sug, as true as a Bug
I wish in your cause I'd ne'er listed;
What shall we do, see the Pole is in view
And I fear that we both shall be Twisted

Sir Edward also had the backing of the Vice Chancellor and that was to be crucial. His unwanted interference swayed enough voters away to ensure his defeat. The news was greeted with joy at a Grand dinner in Trinity College when their two new Members of Parliament were feted.

Sugden tried a second time two years later, only to lose by a mere 29 votes. But then a new opportunity beckoned: he was appointed by the Wellington and Peel administration to become Lord Chancellor in Ireland and Cross had seen him no more.

Sir Edward Sugden had been defeated in his challenge for one of the Cambridge parliamentary seats in 1832 but within a year one of his opponents had been in danger of being thrown out of the House through malpractice.

That man was the University Professor of Political Economy, George Pryme.

Pryme came from an ancient Yorkshire family and had received his academic education at Trinity College where he won prizes for his Greek odes and Latin dissertations. He'd also involved himself fully in the college tradition of 'buzzing', which related to the capacity to imbibe alcohol. Following hall on Sundays it was usual for an undergraduate to invite a large party of friends to partake of wine and a moderate dessert. Afterwards everyone was required to fill a bumper and drink a triple toast to the President, his host and himself.

As the decanter came round the recipient had a difficult decision to make. If he judged there was insufficient wine left to completely fill his large glass then he could challenge the previous drinker to finish it off. But if he got it wrong then the challenger was obliged to drink the remainder and also a bumper out of the next fresh bottle. To many young men this would have seemed no bad thing, but for these trainee priests or lawyers the challenge was to stay sober as long as possible whilst ensuring that their companions were incapable of attending evening chapel.

George Pryme had stayed sober enough to take his degree and also gain a coveted Fellowship, thus ensuring that he was set up for life. All he had to do was to remain single. Instead he married Jane Thackeray, the daughter of an eminent Cambridge surgeon. They set up home in Barnwell Abbey where they raised two children and became acquainted with the various spirits that haunted that ancient building.

Later he bought himself a large house opposite Holy Trinity church in Sidney Street. It was approached through an imposing stone entrance gateway on which he erected the family's coat of arms. The structure had been part of the old Trinity Hostel dating back to before the foundation of the colleges and in keeping with such an ancient building it came complete with a ghost. The apparition of a black lady did not bother Pryme – he'd got quite used to such things at Abbey House – but it was so frightening that no servants could be persuaded to stay more than a week. The matter was only resolved after Pryme and his wife changed the layout of the building and themselves occupied the room in which she walked. It was rumoured that a skeleton had been dug up in the garden which was more than likely, for the previous occupant had been Sir Busick Harwood, Professor of Anatomy, who had later strung up a skeleton in the garden of his house at Bartlow during a dispute with his neighbour.

Another skeleton helped Pryme make his mark in his career. He had turned to the law ministering justice on the Norfolk circuit, which meant he could keep up his connection with the University. One of the cases related to an incident where one poacher had murdered another, burying his victim in a grove of trees not far from his house. There had been no doubt as to the man's guilt but he'd almost escaped the gallows. For the border between Norfolk and the Isle of Ely ran through a wood and nobody was sure which side of the county boundary the body had been buried. However Pryme noticed a gentleman amongst the onlookers who had an unrivalled knowledge of the local area. He was persuaded to give evidence as to which side of the crooked ditch the grave had been dug. That was sufficient to ensure conviction.

Meanwhile George also directed his attention to political economy, a science then in its infancy. His devotion led to his appointment to the first such chair to be established in any British university. Then Professor Pryme began to involve himself in Cambridge town politics.

749

Having been appointed Professor of Political Economy, George Pryme decided to take an active part in Cambridge politics. Like the University, the town returned two members of parliament. They were previously elected by just 80 freemen although recently that number had been increased by the addition of 50 tenants and friend of the Duke of Rutland ensuring that it was His Lordship's nominees who represented his interests in Parliament.
In 1820 Pryme prepared to make an attempt to seize one of those seats. His academic colleagues were convinced that he did not have the ghost of a chance of being elected, and so it proved. But twelve years later, at the first election under the Reform Act, he was invited to try again. This time with Mr Spring Rice as his colleague he was returned at the head of the poll.

The two newly-elected Members of Parliament were, as custom demanded, chaired round the town to receive the congratulations of their supporters. They clambered into a handsome car covered with blue silk and adorned with rosettes of crimson and blue and buff, their respective colours. It was drawn by six grey horses ridden by positions dressed in blue silk jackets and caps. The cortege was headed by a marshal and three trumpeters on horseback and followed by a band of music and a numerous cavalcade of horsemen. The imposing procession paraded the town – Barnwell included – for many hours, pausing in front of various colleges where silver goblets of copas and mulled wine were brought out to refresh the newly-elected MPs who sat bareheaded through a long winter's day

Some onlookers however were disappointed: previously it had been usual for the successful candidates to be seated on wooden chairs fastened to poles carried on men's shoulders. On several occasions the procession would pause while the chairs were tossed up as high as the bearers could reach, amid loud huzzas and to the decided discomfort of the newly-elected.

Now Professor Pryme seemed set for a long and illustrious parliamentary career. Then he received a letter from the Lord Chancellor informing him that he'd been considered as a fit person to be named as a Quorum Commissioner in Fiats in Bankruptcy for Cambridge and the surrounding area. It was a position he accepted promising that no other professional business would be allowed to delay his fulfilment of that office even though the income from the new appointment would be too small to form his principal occupation

But it was an decision that almost cost him his seat. For two years earlier Parliament, anxious to reduce the influence of the Crown, had rules that no judge, commissioner or Secretary of Bankrupts should be capable of sitting as a member of the House of Commons. Now Sir Thomas Freemantle brought the matter to the attention of the House. Sir Thomas was famous for his immense whiskers which were not only the largest owned by any honourable member in the house, but seldom equalled out of doors. Now he was determined make his name for something different.

Pryme claimed that he had tendered his resignation as soon as the issue had been raised and had never actually taken part in any such case. But Freemantle had done his homework, quoting a letter in which Pryme had apologised for not attending a bankruptcy because of an urgent commitment elsewhere. There was no doubt that he had accepted the post and the mere acceptance of office caused a vacation of the seat.

Soon the University Professor was fighting for his parliamentary life, quoting precedents back to the reign of King James I. Certainly his commitment to the bankruptcy work conflicted with his commitment to parliament - but every other member took time off too – and he was not paid a salary for the job.

The Attorney General deliberated at great length before ruling that as Pryme had never actually taken the oath or acted as a Commissioner, the matter should not be pressed but that a Committee should be appointed to inquire further. However Freemantle disagreed: all those who had spoken against him were lawyers; and while he had every respect for their opinions outside of the House, he had no great respect for them inside its walls. They were too much accustomed to the strict and legal mode of considering statutes and did not sufficiently consider the dignity and privileges of Parliament. But he could not gain the support of enough other members – many of whom were former Cambridge students - to have Pryme ejected and the Professor survived to fight another election

750

That Samuel Pickwick visited Cambridge in September 1838 is not in doubt. He was seen by some scores of people at the Theatre Royal in Barnwell promoting his recently published reminiscences, though the audience were distinctly unimpressed. The editor of the Cambridge Chronicle could not fail to acknowledge the presence in their midst of one of the most famous personages of the day but commented "with Pickwick at the theatre we turned to other papers".

Yet if Pickwick's long forgotten presence is without dispute there is a lingering mystery. For a man such as he arriving at a such a place as Cambridge in a such a year as 1838 could not have failed to observe the everyday life of the community, especially as that ordinary life was at the time most extraordinary.

Cambridge was in turmoil, the town council reeling from the impact of municipal reform, the mayor accused of profiteering from the new police force and the University of exceeding its powers over pubs. Everywhere building was taking place from the grand developments of new Fitzwilliam Museum and University Library to the new workhouse on Mill Road and the small streets of New Town. Inclosure Commissioners were at work in the open fields of Chesterton and speculators discussing the new Railway line which was even then pushing north from London.

All this Pickwick discovered, but there was more. During his sojourn he met rogues and vagabonds, befriended prostitutes and professors, stagecoach drivers and tradesmen eking a living despite proctorial disapproval. He saw at first hand the wealth of the colleges and the squalor of the Barnwell backstreets.

All of this he recorded intending to share it with the members of the Corresponding Society he had established to report journeys and adventures and observation of character and manners. Yet that information was never imparted.

For some reason when Pickwick left Cambridge his notes did not.

On 1st April was discovered in a dusty attic in St Andrew's Street a parcel besmirched with soot. When opened it was found to contain a folder packed with cuttings, posters, handbills and prints together with a notebook in a small crabbed hand full of abbreviations and contractions, difficult in the extreme to descipher.

Their actual whereabouts must remain a secret and - given the date of discovery - it could all be a hoax. But there can be to my mind no doubt. With the wealth of detail and observation never before brought together this could only be the lost Cambridge scrapbook of Samuel

Pickwick. For the last 750 weeks I have turned its pages but the notes end suddenly, almost in mid sentence.

So I have investigated further and the last mention I can find is that scores of people saw Samuel Pickwick leave Cambridge. But nobody seems to know where he went – some say it was towards Newmarket, others that he headed to Huntingdon or north into the fen country while more contend he returned to via Royston to the meeting place of his Pickwick Club in the George and Vulture Inn off Lombard Street in the City of London

All however are agreed that it was no ordinary departure, he left on horseback and he was truly flying.

One final piece of paper seems to shed light on the mystery. It is a poster advertising a balloon ascent by Mr Green, the veteran aeronaut who was making his 115th aerial voyage in his Coronation Balloon from a field in Barnwell. And he was to be accompanied on that journey by his aeronautical pony.

Now Pickwick was by nature an inquisitive man and delighted in discoveries. It would appear that he engaged Mr Green in conversation almost until the time of his departure. Then, at the last minute he was invited to hold the bridle while Green relieved himself before his ascent.

It was only the lightest gust of wind but it was sufficient to coax the balloon into the air. It rose above the hedges, soared over the trees and was soon above the birds.

As the breeze carried the balloon across the countryside folk came out to stare at the sight of a flying horse with the somewhat portly personage of Pickwick clinging to its neck.

Where he landed – for descend he must have done at some time – is currently a mystery. Perhaps one day in some forgotten diary his arrival will be noted. Only then can the story be completed.